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Abortion politics and family life : an interpretation.

Patricia Coen Lynch
University of Massachusetts Amherst

ABORTION POLITICS AND FAMILY LIFE: AN INTERPRETATION

A Dissertation Presented

By

PATRICIA COEN LYNCH

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Approved as to style and content by:

William E. Connolly, Chairperson of Committee

Glen Gordon, Member

Curt Tausky, Member

Glen Gordon, Department Head
Political Science

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ABSTRACT

Abortion Politics and Family Life: An Interpretation

(May, 1981)

Patricia Coen Lynch, B.A. Newton College

M.A., University of Massachusetts, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts

Directed by: Professor William E. Connolly

There are many dimensions to the American abortion controversy, although it is examined and understood most often as if there were but one issue involved. There have been few, if any, efforts to understand the ideas and beliefs of all participants in the controversy, to explore the possibility that beliefs about abortion are connected to other political conflicts, and to suggest possibilities for compromise. These are the tasks I have set for myself in my dissertation.

In the first chapter, I suggest why the controversy must be re-examined, arguing that the popularized version of pro-abortionism incorrectly assumes that a majority of Americans supports abortion on demand. In fact, while many are not opposed to abortion in certain instances, most oppose abortion merely at the discretion of the pregnant woman. The reasons for the opposition suggest that important questions such as the status of the fetus and the limits of individual rights have not been definitely answered. Importantly, the Supreme Court's 1973 decisions, establishing abortion on demand, have been opposed by scientists, biologists, and philosophers as well as religious and lay people.

Those most opposed to abortion on demand, as a group, are the working class. In the second chapter, I explore and interpret this way of life. I suggest that the ideal of the extended family is of such great importance to working class people that they oppose any efforts which could threaten or undermine that ideal. Abortion on demand is one, perhaps the most easily articulated, threat to the ideal.

In the third chapter, I set out and critique the popularized version of pro-abortionism, arguing that it misinterprets the strength of its supporters and the motives of most anti-abortionists, fails to deal with the issues of contraceptive responsibility and fetal personhood; and as a coincidence encourages many working class people to move to the Right.

In the fourth chapter, I offer a deeper critique of pro-abortionism, relying on the work of Judith Thompson and Garrett Hardin. I argue that the liberal vision upon which pro-abortionism rests, has an implicit side which celebrates continuity, moral conviction and family stability, though its explicit aspects are at odds with these, threatening to undermine the completely liberal society.

In the final chapter, I argue that there is an abstract case for compromise and reasons for the participants in the abortion controversy to try to achieve a morally acceptable political compromise. The basis would be the presumption of fetal personhood and the desire for family stability. The state would most likely be in the position of aiding those who choose to abort, while officially discouraging them; and trying to minimize its role in family life at a time when families are at their

most dependent and the state's presence maximizes their dependence. The compromise is fraught with tensions and emphasizes the relatedness of the abortion controversy to other political issues, though it seems as well to hold the most promise for defusing the controversy and for suggesting the dimensions of other political conflicts.

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REASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR ABORTION LAWS

In January 1973, when the Supreme Court legalized most abortions, those who had worked for just such legalization assumed that the Justices' support also signalled broad acceptance of the new law. Most pro-abortionists continue to hold this position publicly, though there are good reasons for doubting that most Americans do indeed support abortion on demand.

Judith Blake, a demographer at the University of California, has been conducting research on American beliefs about abortion for over a decade. She is arguing that although a majority of Americans do support abortion in some instances, most Americans do not support abortion on demand (abortion at the discretion of the mother or her doctor).

Blake argues that the major Supreme Court decisions on abortion (Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton) are not all representative of public beliefs. Since 1962, it is true, there have been substantial increases in the number of Americans who say they would support abortions when the life of the mother was endangered, and (to a lesser extent) when there is likelihood of the child being born seriously deformed. It is true that in 1974 almost half the white population questioned in a Gallop Poll responded that they would condone a woman's aborting an offspring she could not afford to rear.[1]

But what is most striking and most revealing about Blake's efforts is the fact that only about 37% of those polled in 1974 supported abortion on

demand. Most respondents made it clear that they supported the availability of abortion in very limited circumstances. What is more, those with the lowest levels of income and education were least likely to support abortion for the reason that no more children are desired. Only 26% of those polled who had grade school educations or less favored abortion for this reason.

It is important to note, too, that men and women with the lowest levels of income and education were the most likely to consider the fetus a person at conception, although nearly half the respondents held this view.

Also, as late as 1975, 61% of those polled did not believe that a woman should be allowed to have an abortion without the consent of her spouse.

Blake's findings suggest that liberal assumptions about widespread support for current abortion laws are open to question. The strong probability that prominent pro-abortionists have misinterpreted the strength and location of their supporters is important to explore because many public policies are predicated on the assumption that most of the populace supports the liberal reforms. And this has created a "tilt" toward or preference for abortion as a means of coping with unwanted and problematic pregnancies.

Most insurance companies, for example, will reimburse unmarried women for termination of their pregnancies, but offer them no maternity coverage.

Some leaders in the movement for abortion on demand have argued that abortion has the potential for trimming substantially the budget

of the welfare state as it is less costly by far to subsidize abortions for the poor than it is to rear their children for eighteen years.[2]

Although this cost-benefit approach does not seem to be explicit policy, many black leaders have complained about the pressure put on black welfare recipients by their social workers not to carry their pregnancies to term. In some instances, social workers threatened to withhold welfare checks if the women did not go along with the abortions.[3]

There is also pressure on those who perform, or who are able potentially to perform, abortions. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, for example, currently is investigating charges by applicants to medical schools that admissions officers are refusing to accept applicants who "stated refusal to participate in abortion and/or sterilization procedures."[4]

To date, several medical schools have acknowledged frankly that this is their policy. In such an intensely competitive situation as trying to gain admittance to an American medical school, it is difficult not to view the right to perform abortions as the <u>obligation</u> to perform them.

This move from "right" to "obligation" is evident too in the advice columns of most newspapers, where many present letters from women pressured into abortions they did not really want. Linda Bird Franke, in her book <u>The Ambivalence of Abortion</u>, quotes Carol Downer, director of the Feminist Women's Health Center in Los Angeles:

> It's gotten to the point in some metropolitan communities that if you get pregnant, then you have an abortion. It's that simple. And if you don't have the abortion, then there must be something wrong with you. You must really have some sort of complex. And so most women go ahead and have them.[5]

Franke's book is filled with women, who, indeed, "went ahead and had them" despite the fact that they were ambivalent about or even opposed to the action. The pressure, by spouses, boyfriends, parents, was strong; and most found it difficult to find support for their desires to complete their pregnancies. Most still seemed very unsettled about their abortions. Some continued to grieve for the children they aborted.

In a society where the impression is that abortion is almost universally accepted as a method of dealing with unplanned pregnancies; when that method has the additional qualities of being relatively quick, safe, and inexpensive; and when the alternatives to abortion (financial insecurity, the experience of being an unwed mother) are not modified to make child-rearing more of a choice, it is understandable that many women see abortion as their only real option for troublesome pregnancies.

But if the impression of overwhelming support for abortion is false, there is a substantial reason to re-think the American experience, particularly, to re-examine the commonly held liberal assumptions about the sources of opposition to our abortion laws. Blake's work in particular puts considerable pressure on pro-abortionists who assume that opposition to liberal abortion laws is generated for the most part by right-wing Catholics and vengeful men.[6]

But once doubt is cast on the premier assumption of most pro-abortionists that elective abortion is widely supported, their position as a whole deteriorates. The remaining assumptions (concerning the rights of the mother over her child, the oppositions' hatred of women, for example) are dependent, in large part, on broad <u>support</u> for their legitimacy. If we cannot accept the popularized version of pro-abortionism,

we must identify who the anti-abortionists actually are and explore the beliefs which support their position.

In Chapter Two, I shall explore working class anti-abortionism. I have limited my explorations primarily to this group, because they are the most opposed to elective abortion, yet the least publicized. The actions of working class people have also been severely misinterpreted by most pro-abortionists, and these misinterpretations are likely to cause these people deep injury. Finally, I have focused on these people because the working class way of life suggests the limits of liberalism more clearly than others do.

In this chapter, I shall try to deepen and extend the work begun by Judith Blake on anti-abortionism and the working class. For Blake argues that, as with the population control policies, most liberals and feminists have based their assumptions about the needs and desires of working class people on false assumptions. They have assumed, for example, that poor and working class parents want fewer children than they have; have been unable to procure and use contraceptives effectively; would welcome the opportunity to abort; and (in the case of women) would prefer career opportunities other than motherhood.[7]

Blake's findings are that working class and poor families have in the past and continue to want larger families than do middle and upper class parents. She finds, too, that those who wish to limit their family sizes have been able to obtain and use contraceptives effectively.

Blake argues that efforts by government agencies to encourage family planning among these classes have met with some hostility as many members resent and feel threatened by being so often the targets of government efforts at population control.

Blake argues that for these people, family roles are the most significant of those they play. They see themselves first as parents, spouses, sons and daughters. Husbands work hard at dead-end jobs to ensure the financial security of their families. Wives resist the lure of more exciting careers to ensure that the children are raised strictly. Even time is usually marked by the pregnancies, births, weddings and deaths of family members.

It is rational for such people to want to maintain the importance of these roles given the paucity of alternatives. And public policies which put pressure on these roles are likely to be resisted by those at whom they are aimed.

For the working class particularly, abortion as a method of birth control poses a clear threat to family life. Its easy availability and the fact that many policymakers seem to prefer it as a method for dealing with unexpected pregnancies makes abortion a particular threat to those who are dependent or potentially dependent upon the state.

This threat to the ideal of working class family life is exacerbated by the fact that the overwhelming number of women who obtain abortions are unmarried and have no other children. Thus abortion is considered a means of preventing or eliminating family life. Also, the working class ideal of family life appears to be threatened by the Supreme Court's decision that neither the spouse nor (in the case of an unmarried minor) the parents must be consulted when a pregnant woman wants an abortion.

Many of the ideas and beliefs which have dominated the abortion controversy reflect middle and upper class assumptions about work and family life which working class people do not share. Peter Skerry argues,

for example, that middle class and upper class men are more likely to have challenging careers which frequently take them away from family concerns; that these men are more likely to think of themselves, to evaluate themselves, in terms of their occupational success or failure; and that their careers are more likely to spill over into their "family time."[8]

These men are more likely than working class counterparts to have severed or loosened ties with relatives, as their professional success is often contingent upon their willingness to relocate. Their wives are more likely to have the educational background, leisure and financial resources to explore careers other than child-rearing. Their children are more likely to spend their leisure time outside the home and immediate neighborhood. The family unit has less of an exclusive claim on the physical and emotional resources of its members.

This is in sharp contrast to the situation of working class men for whom the family has become an important escape from what is often a routine and undignified work life. The family, if anything, has increased in significance for these men. Children are reared in tight rein.

On one level, I shall argue, the abortion controversy is as heated as it is because it crystalizes a conflict of ways of life and because that conflict has not yet been fully, or even substantially, understood. In the third chapter, I shall set out the popular version of pro-abortionism to suggest ways in which it is based on misinterpretations of the working class way of life; and to suggest other basic problems with the position which could, if confronted, suggest possibilities for compromise with the anti-abortionists.

On another level, the abortion controversy suggests the poverty of the liberalism which spawned most pro-abortionism. In Chapter Four I shall focus on two prominent pro-abortionists - Judith Harvis Thompson and Garrett Hardin - to show how their pro-abortionism has an implicit side which can undermine the attainment of the liberal vision which inspires them. The implicit side requires the traditional social arrangements which their explicit social programs disturb. It is unrecognized in part because of their claims to political neutrality and, in part because their liberalism encourages an abstract individualist view of the world which cannot capture important aspects of social life.

On one level, the abortion controversy is impelled by misinterpretations and on another by a vision which is only partially understood.

In my concluding chapter, I shall explore the prospects for resolving the controversy. I shall argue that there is an abstract case to be made for the morally informed political compromise, and that in important ways, there is such a case to be made for our abortion controversy. Although such a compromise would not be the ideal most participants would prefer, there are grounds for a compromise and some reason to expect that each side could, on reflection, acknowledge at least the minimal amount of legitimacy to each way of life which would promote a spirit of compromise.

NOTES

[1]Judith Blake, "The Abortion Decisions: Judicial Review and Public Opinion," in Abortion: New Directions For Policy Studies, ed. Manier, Liu and Solomon (Notre Dame, 1977) and "Abortion and Public Opinion: the 1960-1970 Decade," Science, Vol. 171 (February 12, 1971), pp. 540-549.

[2]Garrett Hardin, Mandatory Motherhood (Boston: Beacon, 1974), and Gloria Steinem, "Abortion Alert," MS (November, 1977), p. 118.

[3]Erma Clardy Craven, "Abortion, Poverty, and Black Genocide: Gifts to the Poor?" in Abortion and Social Justice, ed. Hilgers and Horan (New York: Random, 1972).

[4]Commonweal (March, 1979).

[5]Linda Bird Franke, The Ambivalence of Abortion (New York: Random, 1977).

[6]Although this is a commonly made claim, Blake's findings are that Catholics and Protestants are about equally opposed to abortion on demand.

[7]Judith Blake, "Population Policy for Americans: Is the Government Being Misled?" Science, Vol. 164 (May 2, 1969), pp. 522-529.

[8]Peter Skerry, "The Class Conflict Over Abortion," The Public Interest (Summer, 1978), pp. 69-84.

CHAPTER II

ANTI-ABORTIONISM AND THE WORKING CLASS IDEAL OF FAMILY LIFE - AN INTERPRETATION

1. The Interpretive Method - A Defense and Explanation

In this chapter, I shall offer an interpretation of working class anti-abortionism. My analysis is intended, in part, as an instantiation of the interpretive method of social inquiry. My research on working class women is based, in substantial part, upon dialogues I have had with them, the dialogue being the appropriate method for the interpretive mode. But since the appropriateness of particular models of explanation is widely contested in the social sciences, my choice of the interpretive method requires some defense.

The goal of strict behavioral science is to construct a science of man equal to the presumed objectivity of the natural sciences. Such a science would include a range of concepts which would be used by any trained observer to explain human behavior. Its proponents assume that human action can be captured in such an objective vocabulary. But the model explanation has been criticized from many perspectives.

Thomas Kuhn, for example, argues in The Structure of Scientific Explanation that even the natural sciences cannot lay claim to the neutrality its proponents claim for the behavioral sciences. Natural scientists work within paradigms which establish the parameters of research, indeed, what is to count as a fact.[1]

The critics of the behavioral method in the social sciences argue that social reality is not objective, as many behavioralists assume,

but is shaped, in part, by the ideas and beliefs the participants have of themselves. And these ideas and beliefs are embedded in social practices, roles, and institutions.

Peter Winch, in The Idea of A Social Science, argues that most of our experiences are possible because we have a vocabulary in which to express them; and in this respect most of our experiences would be impossible outside social life. The emotions of love, grief, trust, resentment, for example, presuppose the existence of others who understand the intentions and beliefs which are embedded in those concepts and who are capable, therefore, of responding at the level suggested by those intentions and beliefs.

Some of our experiences, moreover, are possible only within a particular form of life. A participant in an exchange of goods could not characterize herself as having accrued a "profit" if she were not a participant in a form of life which marked this distinction and the corresponding ones of a capitalist economy. Neither could a shepherd of old have characterized himself as a "conspicuous consumer" nor his sheep a "bad investment." The form of life in which he was implicated lacked such vocabulary, hence the possibility for him to identify himself and his sheep in this way: the ideas and beliefs appropriate to these characterizations were not available for the having.

On this view, social explanation must begin with an understanding of the ideas and beliefs which the participants have of themselves, for, to repeat, it is these which constitute an important part of what they are. This understanding precludes the type of objectivity required by strict behaviorists because the observer must, to some extent at least,

immerse herself in the way of life and identify with it. It is unavoidable.

Now, it may be that the self-understandings of the participants, even if they are understood perfectly by the observer, will be distorted or incomplete. The social scientist, after understanding the ideas and beliefs of the participants in a way of life, might offer an interpretation of it which is at odds with that which the participants themselves would give.

Though the social scientist is building on the self-understandings of those whose actions she is trying to explain, when she goes beyond these, she is relying, implicitly, or explicitly, on a philosophical anthropology, a theory of man to support her interpretation. The philosophical anthropology is built into the explanatory framework and cannot be severed from it. It is because of the partial self-constitution of social reality and the absolute dependence of social explanation on a philosophical anthropology which cannot be proven objectively, that neutrality cannot be a goal of the social sciences.

For as Charles Taylor argues in Interpretation and the Sciences of Man, social explanation is reflexive. The social scientist argues that men are brutish, nasty and selfish, for example, and this interpretation helps to shape her beliefs about others and, probably, their response to her. The speculation helps to shape social reality.

It is the reflexive nature of social explanation which is responsible for the "hermeneutical circle" characteristic of interpretive social science. Interpreters are engaged in "readings" of social ideas, beliefs, meanings, and if the readings are not acceptable to other social

scientists, the explanation of social action will not make sense either. The only recourse in this predicament is to try to persuade those who do not "see" with more readings. There is nowhere else the argument can go; though Taylor insists that working within the interpretive circle, it is not inappropriate to ask social scientists to "change themselves," which is precisely what seems necessary if we are to come to grips with social theories at odds with our own.

There is here no "knock-down" evidence which will prove a theory true and which will be acceptable to all involved in the enterprise. All explanations, all interpretations, are subject to claims of "distorted consciousness" by those who have different readings of social meanings.

Some of the implications which flow from this model of social explanation are unnerving; and I suspect that this has encouraged many social scientists to doubt that there are any reasons for choosing one theoretical framework over another. But there are some tests which can help establish the validity of an explanation. We can be legitimately suspicious of an explanation, for example, which is built on a view of human relationships which the explainee, in her ordinary life, rejects. And we can be suspicious of explanations of social life which the participants, on reflection, reject as inadequate characterizations of their social life. But our clearest explanations will always be those which give us some perspective; hence our most profound social explanations will be historical explanations.

2. Interpreting Working Class Anti-abortionism

The dialogue form is the most appropriate mode for interpreting a way of life. Ideally, it can help the interpreter understand a way of life and also accommodate the reflexive nature of interpretation, by allowing both the interpreter and the participants to change the direction of the discourse when, perhaps, the dialogue suggests new understandings for everyone involved.

For my research, I began speaking with women suggested to me by women with whom I work (at a part-time position in a supermarket). These women, in turn, suggested others who might be interested in speaking with me. In all, I spoke with twelve women.

In each instance, I spoke with the women in their own homes, held two conversations with each, for a total of about 5 hours spent talking with each woman. In every instance, I was treated hospitably and invited to lunch; and in every instance, I accepted. The conversations were recorded on tape - a fact which made the women self-conscious only for a few minutes.

I have tried to show the inner rationality of the working class way of life, so that I can build upon it to suggest how it has been misinterpreted by pro-abortionists; how it is at odds with important aspects of liberal society; and how liberalism ultimately is dependent for its success on aspects of working class life.

The validity of my interpretation is dependent, in part, on the extent to which it explains better than others have, the reasons for working class anti-abortionism. And the validity is established, in part, by the compatibility of my interpretation with other evidence we

have about the working class way of life.

I consider the project important for two reasons. First, as I have already suggested, there is recent evidence which suggests that most members of the working class are opposed to abortion on demand.[4] The National Gallop Polls conducted by Judith Blake during the last decade revealed that 70% of those with grade school education (51% of those with high school educations), and 62% of those living on incomes of $7,000 or less, were opposed to legalization of abortion during any time after conception.[5]

This contrasts sharply with the beliefs of those with college educations, of whom 87% approved of legalization of first trimester abortions. Of those with incomes of $20,000, or more, 62% approved.

Education and income levels seem to offer the greatest indication of beliefs about abortion on demand, the personhood of the fetus, and the rights of all involved in the decision to abort. Even religious beliefs, which are most commonly claimed to be the determinant of beliefs about abortion, are not so revealing as are the educational and income levels of the respondents. The beliefs of Catholics and Protestants, for example, were about the same with respect to beliefs about legalization of abortion when the mother has been raped, when her health is endangered by the fetus, when the fetus might be born with a congenital defect, when there is no desire to have another child, and when the mother believes she cannot afford to rear another child.[6]

There is, then, suggestive evidence that the abortion controversy may harbor a class conflict. This possibility, though, has been largely unexplored.

The leaders of the Right-to-Life movement, for example, assume that their support comes from those who wish to protect the lives of the unborn. Their interpretation of their increasing strength does not generally include the possibility that there may be other reasons why supporters might oppose liberal abortion laws.

And most feminists and family planners assume either that working class people support abortion on demand, or that the broad opposition to abortion which did exist is vanishing as members come to see that their beliefs about strict abortion laws were irrational.

These positions by the principal participants in the abortion controversy have encouraged a closing-out of consideration of working class opposition to abortion on demand. And the second reason for my pursuing another interpretation of working class anti-abortionism is to suggest that such a closing-out increased, perhaps unwittingly, the burdens the members of this class already carry.

In this chapter, I shall build on the recent evidence of working class opposition to abortion, interpreting and filling out what such research only suggests exists.

My interpretation is based on several sources. The first is recent interpretations of working class life, particularly Lillian Rubin's Worlds of Pain and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class. These studies suggest that while there has been a significant democratization of the American way of life, substantial inequalities remain which encourage different ways of life, indeed, different self-understandings among members of different classes.

My second source is the set of in depth conversations I had with working class women. My purpose in conducting these conversations was to substantiate and bolster the work of Rubin, Sennett, and Cobb and to delve specifically into beliefs about abortion. My final source is my own experience with working class people, which comes from a part-time job I hold in a supermarket, the neighborhood I live in currently, and my own background as a member of a working class family in a working class community.

I shall draw on and elaborate upon these sources to show that working class opposition to abortion can be understood best by seeing how these beliefs are connected to others which celebrate family life, generational ties, respect for life. These beliefs reflect a set of commitments, often not articulated, which underpin an ideal way of life and a particular self-understanding and self-dignity.

These beliefs and commitments distinguish members of this class from members of other classes, where we cannot expect to find different ideals of family, work, neighborhood life.

What is more, the actual upholding of this shared ideal within the class itself differs - a circumstance which can help explain both the intensity of working class opposition to abortion and the fact that some working class women do have abortions.

For the ideal of nurturance and self-sacrifice for the extended family is held by most working class people and it is against this ideal that members assess their conduct and measure their self-esteem.

In my own research, the coherence between the ideal and the actual conduct of the working class women with whom I spoke seemed to be quite

high. They believed, for example, that they had certain obligations to their elderly parents, and, indeed, they did take their parents in with them when they could no longer fend for themselves.

I suspect that such a strong coherence can be attributed, substantially, to several circumstances. The families I was involved with were firmly rooted in specific neighborhoods and communities; they had no plans or pressing reasons (such as lack of jobs) to move elsewhere. This lack of mobility produced a stability which seemed to facilitate the logistics of caring for extended family members. It encouraged, as well, a great degree of predictability about relationships and expectations. Members could know with reasonable certainty, for example, who would be out of work when, who would be responsible for the care of certain aunts and uncles, etc.

All of the families with whom I was involved had strong ethnic traditions and religious commitments to draw on which were compatible with the working class ideal of family life. All of these circumstances promote a broad identification with special commitments and obligations to the extended family as well as the impetus to fulfill them.

It seems clear, though, that even though most working class people do identify with these obligations and commitments, not all of them live up to them. In 1976, for example, there was one divorce for every two marriages. The divorce rate has increased by 127% from 1962-1976.[7] And the working class people are just as likely to divorce as are members of other classes.[8]

The United States Children's Bureau estimates that between 50,000 and 75,000 incidents of child abuse occur in the United States every

year.[9] This, too, seems to cut across class lines.[10]

I shall suggest that though the ideal of working class family life is embraced and defended by a majority of members, not all members live up to the obligations and commitments which are the basis of this ideal.

With respect to abortion, liberal abortion laws are perceived by most members of this class as a threat to the ideal itself. And because the ideal and the self-identification with it are linked so intimately, liberal abortion laws also threaten the self-identity of most working class people.

We can expect members of this class who both hold and largely live up to the ideal of family life to oppose such laws. And I want to argue that we can also expect strong opposition from members of this class who identify with the ideal but who do not always, or even largely, live up to the obligations and commitments which are its basis. Indeed, sometimes their public celebration of the ideal and public opposition to abortion is stronger than other members of their class. Their sense of self is just as, if not more, threatened by liberal abortion laws than the others.

Finally, there are those members of the working class who do not oppose liberal abortion laws - those, I would suggest, for whom the ideal of family life has no or little meaning. Though recent evidence suggests that this group is a small minority, it does exist. I shall suggest that the circumstances which promote identification with the ideal of working class family life others share are missing or diminishing for these people, thus lessening the likelihood that an attack on the ideal would prove a strong response from them.

I hope, then, to deepen recent interpretations of working class anti-abortionism first, by illuminating the way the working class ideal of family life is threatened by liberal abortion laws; second, by suggesting that opponents of abortion include those members of the class who identify with the ideal, though they do not necessarily uphold it privately (thus explaining why members of this class divorce, abuse family members, get abortions, while publicly, often vociferously rejecting all of these); and third, to suggest that where conditions compatible with this ideal are eroding, we can expect working class people to lean more in support of liberal abortion laws than they would in more nurturing circumstances.

I shall begin, then with a consideration of the ideal of working class life.

The importance of the family to members of the working class is evident in almost every aspect of working class experience. Consider this account of a typical day of one of the women with whom I held several conversations:

> I get up around 6:30 and make breakfast for me and Wade (her husband). I get Brandy (her daughter) up and get her dressed. We drop her off at my mother's or at one of my sisters' and then we go to work. After work, we usually pick up some groceries and then we get Brandy. We might stay awhile and talk. Then, I make supper while Wade and Brandy watch T.V.
>
> After dinner, I clean up, maybe do some housework, watch some T.V. until Brandy settles down. Or maybe my father comes for a visit or we go to see him and my mother.
>
> If I don't work, Brandy sleeps a little longer, I do more housework; maybe I go to my mother's to do the wash. Sometimes, we'll go some place on Sunday; or sometimes there's time for one of my projects; but mostly this is what we do. Nothing special.

It is very common for working class people to live close to their parents and other relatives. Often, they live within the same house or on the same street; almost always they live in the same town.

And it is generally the extended family that provides its members with most of their social contacts. Members generally visit one another frequently, exchange news, discuss family problems, perhaps watch television or play cards together. Extended family members generally act as babysitters for one ancther for infrequent nights out, or, more usually, when the mother must work.

In my research and experience, it was not at all unusual to find mothers and married daughters and sisters who regularly shopped together for food, clothing, appliances. Neither was it uncommon to find members borrowing money, food, clothes, cars, or tools from one another.

Most accounts of typical days are filled with activities shared with or accomplished for extended family members. There are calls to mothers and sisters; errands run with or for other family members; visits with ailing or elderly parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. So, too, the primary concerns are family concerns: a sister's shaky marriage, a brother's trouble with the police, a husband's desire for a more organized household.

Says Lillian Rubin:

> Generally, it is the relationships with extended family - parents, and siblings - that are at the heart of working class social life... These are the people who are seen most often and most regularly, whose lives are shared both emotionally and socially. These are the people with whom intimacies are maintained - who can be trusted with the care of young children on the rare occasion when a couple takes an evening out alone, perhaps to celebrate a birthday or an anniversary.[11]

Working class men and women might have friends with whom they talk at work, neighbors with whom they keep up occasionally, or (particularly for the women) old friends they call or visit once in a while. For the most part, though, the bulk of their leisure time is spent at home, with spouse and children, or with members of the extended family.

How has the extended family come to play such an important role in working life - a role apparently it does not play for members of other classes? Lillian Rubin argues that the family has a different, increased significance for working class people because the institutions which generally compete with it for self-absorption are fairly closed off to members of this class. The most dramatic example of this is the institution of work.

A typical working class job requires little skill and training, is highly insecure and tedious. Challenge, skill and companionship are minimal. In short, the job requires and generally receives very little absorption of the worker. It is unusual to find a worker who identifies with his job in the way a professional would. Instead, the meaningful aspect of such working lives are found <u>outside</u> the place of work. Says one of the workers Sennett and Cobb interviewed: "...the job's just cash to live; the things that matter every day to me are at home... the family, people in the neighborhood."[12]

The family becomes a retreat for working class men. Says one of my co-workers: "My family and my work life are like two different worlds. I come home; I shut the door; I'm with my kids. I live for them."

Working class men turn to the family for the sense of dignity and purpose difficult to find in their work lives.

Sennett and Cobb argue that the primary source of self-respect for most workers is the "ideology of sacrifice" members make for their families. They argue that those at the bottom of the job ladder, in a society which professes equality of opportunity as a goal, must either acknowledge that this goal has not been reached and they are its victims, or recognize that they deserve their bottom-rung position because the system is working and they are its least able or motivated members.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the system is not working as conceived. Inequalities in income, for example, have not leveled off in the last few decades.[13] There is a connection between income level and occupation which illuminates other inequalities. Those in professional and white collar occupations are more likely than those in blue collar jobs to receive benefits in addition to salary.

They are apt to have more comprehensive health insurance, sick pay and disability benefits; they are likely to have more liberal vacation benefits, increased job security and retirement funds. Also, there is generally more job responsibility and autonomy in salaried occupations.

And finally, there is a tight connection between the income level of one's parents and one's educational progress.[14]

Such inequalities intertwine and encourage stability in the system. Thus, working class children are likely to have the same or similar goals and ways of life as their parents.

Sennett and Cobb argue that while many of the working class men they interviewed acknowledged in the abstract that the system of equality of opportunity is not working fairly, most, on a personal level, blame themselves for their fate. Their low-level positions are

experienced as personal failures rather than public injustices.

Nearly every worker with whom Sennett and Cobb spoke said at some point: "If only I had what it takes, things would have been different."[15] Or,

> Look, I know it's nobody's fault but mine that I got stuck here where I am, I mean...if I wasn't such a dumb shit...no, it ain't that neither...if I'd applied myself, I know I got it in me to be different, can't say anyone did it to me.[16]

Or,

> I really didn't have it upstairs to do satisfying work, if you know that I mean...I just wasn't smart enough to avoid hauling garbage.[17]

These workers salvage, or shape, a sense of self-respect from their jobs by viewing their labor as a sacrifice made for their families. Work has meaning because it is being done for others, for the family, so that they can have the homes, vacations, financial security a husband and father is supposed to provide.

The self-respect flows from the fact that the working class man considers his sacrifice freely chosen. He has made a <u>choice</u> to sacrifice his energy, time, perhaps his good health, for his family. What is more, without his sacrifice, the members of his family could not maintain dignity <u>themselves</u>. They would be forced to collect welfare, a humiliating experience for most working class people.

The ideology of sacrifice extends well beyond the provision of the family's material needs. Working class fathers also speak of sacrificing their free time for their kids, so they'll "learn the right values." For most men, working tedious jobs with plenty of overtime makes spending leisure time with their children an enormous sacrifice.

Usually, the ideology extends to one's parents and one's parents-in-law, particularly when these folks grow older. Although most working class children could not afford to institutionalize their aging parents even if they wished this, most would never consider doing so. The belief that one is responsible for one's family members is a commitment deeply rooted in working class life, one which is emphasized and made more freely chosen by the ideology of sacrifice.

This sense of familial obligation apparently is not so strong in members of the other classes. Lillian Rubin found the difference quite striking. When asked to fantasize about what they'd do if they inherited one million dollars, 34% of the working class people she interviewed said they would help members of their extended families, while only one professional said this - and he was the only professional interviewed from a working class background.[18]

Rubin speculates that members of the other classes do not need usually to consider the financial well-being of their parents, as their parents are generally financially secure. Indeed, they often help out their children. But this explanation risks the assumption that if only working class children had such resources, they would, say, institutionalize their parents when they were no longer capable of living alone.

But when this subject came up with some of the working class women with whom I spoke, their responses were, in general: "I could never do that. I could never put my parents in a nursing home. They belong with us. They'd be so hurt if we put them in a place like that. And, after all, children are supposed to take care of their parents, right?"

The belief that one's parents belong with other family members is

much like the belief I heard stated many times that one's children did not belong in nursery school. "I don't want strangers looking out for my kids. Besides, I mean, unless they're really desperate for money, and she has no family, the wife should be able to take care of the kids herself." These commitments to maintain the closeness of the family usually require some sacrificing by the members. Consider two accounts that came up in some of my conversations.

In the first, the woman's father had died over a year before. One of the woman's sisters immediately moved in with the widowed mother, bringing along her own husband and three children. Another sister bought the first home in the mother's neighborhood that became available, honoring the mother's wish to stay put. All of the woman's children live in the same town and take turns running errands for her, keeping her company and assisting her through her period of grief.

There was no hesitation, apparently, by any family members about making such arrangements, though this is a drain on all of them, I am told.

In another family, the grandmother "visits" each of her four children a few weeks at a time. She has long since sold her house. Her visits are an emotional and physical drain on the families as the woman is unable to get around much by herself and is disoriented occasionally. She eats heartily, is enormous in size, and generally breaks the slats on the bed she sleeps in. There is no consideration by any of her children to institutionalize the woman, even though she is eligible, through welfare, for some such care.

Such gentle treatment of their aged members comes, as it were,

naturally, to many working class families. The relationships in the family are built on loyalty to members (to almost all extents); gentle and personal treatment of the elderly and dependent; stability in marriage, exclusive care and rearing of the children.

This does not mean that these obligations are never experienced as burdensome, or even as posing extreme hardships upon family members. By and large, though, these obligations are accepted without question, if not without complaint, about burdens which they often impose.

Neither does this mean that no one is ever mistreated in a working class family. Instances of child, spouse, and parent abuse are increasing, and the abuse does not seem to be class-specific.

The important point is that such treatment of the elderly and other members of the extended family is part of the ideal by which most working class people assess their conduct. It is something with which they strongly identify, and would defend publicly, even though, for various reasons, not all members are always or even largely living up to the obligations and commitments inherent in the ideal.

Joseph Howell, in Hard Living on Clay Street, argues that there are at least two types of working class families: the "hard" and the "settled" livers. The "settled" families are those who not only identify with the image of family life as close-knit and demanding but also, for the most part, live up to requirements of this ideal. The "hard" livers are those who, though they strongly identify with the image and can be expected to defend the way of life to others, do not actually abide by its requirements. Howell suggests that members of both types can be considered members of the same class, though their differences emphasize

that there are tensions within the class itself.[19]

Lillian Rubin, too, noted in her analysis of a working class community that many of the couples she interviewed had an ideal of family life before them which they used to evaluate their own actions. She suggests that not all of the couples with whom she spoke seemed to be living up to the image, though they were careful to present themselves as though they were, and to fend off any challenges she would make to the image itself.

It is likely, then, that even though most working class people identify with a vision of family life which exacts long-term commitments and sacrifice from its members, not all members will actually, for various reasons, live up to those commitments. The important point is that their self-identifications with the roles, expectations, the entire way of life, are so firmly rooted, that threats to the image of family life, whether or not all members are actually faithful to it, are likely to be firmly challenged. The potential loss of bearings, loss of self, is just as, if not more, threatening to those members of the working class who cling to but do not always uphold the image of family life, as it is to those who largely do.

An in depth understanding of the way of life can help us to understand how some liberal reforms, particularly liberal abortion laws, threaten the very basis of that way of life. The understanding is deepened when we see how there are conflicts within the class itself over those who do and do not live up to shared expectations, and when we see how the self-identifications, nevertheless, are shared by most, though not all members.

Now the ideology of sacrifice, to continue to flesh out the ideal, is assumed, almost exclusively, for the benefit of family members. It is assumed, moreover, not only by the male breadwinner, but by all family members.

The wife is supposed to make do, not complain too much, assume as much of the extended family obligations as she can. Children are expected to help out around the house, behave in school and around the neighborhood, and assist their grandparents when asked.

Underlying the ideology of sacrifices are commitments that help to keep the extended family intact: hard work, support, willingness to forego immediate pleasure for the needs of others.

These commitments, though, are generally rather tacit, not implicitly embraced or even realized. This seems evident in the shock expressed in such statements as: "I could never go on welfare," or "I could never put my parents (or grandparents) in a place like that," or "I could never send my kids to nursery school." It was as if they were asked, for the first time, to consider the unconsiderable.

The ideology of sacrifice adds an element of choice to these commitments, and, most importantly, and as a consequence, a degree of self-respect to the sacrifices. There are others, after all, who do not provide for their families; who would put their parents away; who don't care if their youngsters are properly raised; who complain about their husbands' abilities as providers. They could do these things too; but they choose not to be like these others.

Sennett and Cobb argue that the ideology of sacrifice and the self-respect which flows from it are fragile and threatened from several

directions. Welfare recipients pose a threat, for example, because they suggest that the man's family would be provided for even without his working. Much of the resentment toward welfare programs and the recipients themselves, which seems to be characteristic of working class men, may be understood as a defense of the limited measure of self-respect staying off welfare allows them.

Consider these conversation fragments recorded by Sennett and Cobb about welfare recipients:

> I work for my money. My job is to work for my family. They don't want to work, they live for nothing but kicks, nothing but good booze and good sex.
>
> What kills me are these people that are on welfare and things like that - or like these colored people that are always squakin'. Yet they don't wanta work. I go out. I work sometimes nine, ten days in a row. I got five children. That's what burns me, when somebody else - like the woman on the street here that collects welfare. She's a phony, but she can still collect it. She takes a cab back and forth and we pay for it.[20]

Most will acknowledge that some recipients of welfare are not frauds and could not survive without some assistance. They agree, as well, that they have an obligation to assist these needy with their taxes. Yet these men would not consider going on welfare themselves. Such an act would undermine the sacrifice they are making for their families as well as the dignity which comes from making the sacrifices.

The ideology of sacrifice common to working class men is also threatened by working class wives who want to go back to work. According to Lillian Rubin, 58% of working class women work outside the home, most of them in part-time positions.[21]

This often, though certainly not always, poses a threat to their husbands, because if their wives have to work, it is a signal that the

men are failing, as least to some extent to provide for their families' support.

Consider the response of a working class husband Rubin interviewed on the subject of his wife working.

> She just doesn't know how to be a real wife, you know, feminine and really womanly. She doesn't know how to give respect because she's too independent. She feels that she's a working woman and she puts in almost as many hours as I do and brings home a paycheck, so there's no one person above the other. She doesn't want there to be a king in this household.
>
> I'd like to feel like I wear the pants in this family. Once my decision is made, it should be made and that's it. She should just carry it out. But it doesn't work that way around here. Because she's working and making money, she thinks she can argue back whenever she feels like it.[22]

The husband's sacrifice is enhanced when his wife is fully dependent upon him. It is not automatically undermined if the wife works, particularly if she works only part-time, draws a small paycheck, and encourages her spouse to think of her contribution as marginal or as "pin money." This seems to be the way that most of the women with whom Rubin and I spoke presented their jobs to their husbands, though most also admitted that their financial contributions were probably much more for necessities than luxuries.

The validity of the husband's sacrifice and his self-esteem are severely threatened, however, when the wife insists that her husband is as dependent upon her work for his security as he would like her to be upon his.

Sennett and Cobb argue that the ideology of sacrifice is also jeopardized by successful children who move out of the community to new career opportunities. Fathers find their hard work "rewarded" in

an unexpected way as the family life which gave their sacrifices meaning is broken up in the ultimate fulfillment of those sacrifices. Thus, the unit for which they sacrificed is also undermined by those sacrifices.

In my own experience, I have not found any instances of this. I suspect not that it never occurs, but rather that the opportunities for escaping a working class life are not so available as Sennett and Cobb seem to suggest. In my experience, and certainly in Rubin's, most of the children of working class parents expect to and have departed very little from their parents' way of life.

Their argument does suggest, though, the intimate connection which exists between the ideology of sacrifice and the importance of extended family ties to working class people. For the working class man especially, his family is his most important resource. It provides companionship, an outlet for tension and, perhaps, for some of his natural talents. The family, most of all, is a place of solace.

The belief that one is <u>sacrificing</u> for the family legitimizes the time spent at work in boring, often demanding jobs. His work helps to keep the family unit intact, to give its members and himself the self-respect of staying off the welfare rolls.

Since most other avenues for independence and achievement are closed off to most working class men, the family is enhanced as that institution through which the young family member can hope to achieve a sense of purpose and respect.

For, as Lillian Rubin demonstrates, even when there is evident talent in a working class youngster, it is generally not fostered. Its fulfillment often becomes the possessor's daydream. And the future is

not a career and lifestyle commensurate with one's natural abilities, but one which mirrors their parents' adulthood. They'll most likely marry, work in jobs similar to their parents, live in the same community, and rear their children with similar values.

As one of Rubin's respondents said in response to her question: "When you were little, what did you think you'd like to do when you grew up?"

> I dreamed I wanted to be a policeman, but I just never followed through with it.
>
> (Rubin: Why was that?)
>
> I really didn't think I was smart enough, I guess I knew you had to go through three, maybe four years of college. And I don't know, I just kind of let it go. Even if I had thought I was smart enough, there was no way I ever thought about going to college. I guess the really big dream was just to get out of high school and get a job. Things were tough at home. I wanted more than anything else to get some money in my pocket so that I could do something, have some fun once in a while. Now, I can't figure out why I thought working was such a big deal. But how can you know things like that when you're a kid?[23]

Working class girls seem to have a similar lack of clarity about careers. One of the wives Rubin spoke with said: "I never had any goals about being anything, except I always figured I'd get married and have kids, and that would be enough for anybody."[24]

And one of the women with whom I spoke:

> In high school, you had to go to the guidance counselor every year and tell him what you wanted to do when you got out. Once I told him I wanted to go to college, once to beauty school, and once, I think, to art school. The whole thing made me really nervous because you had to have everything planned out before you went in. But all he ever did was say 'that's a good thing to do,' I mean, I didn't get a lot of help. Anyhow, I figured I'd get married and not have to worry.

And for most working class youngsters, marriage and child-rearing, which most often mean the same thing, are the ways to establish independence from parents and grandparents. Young men get jobs and marry; young women marry and have children. That is how most working class men and women enter adulthood.

Family roles, family models, and family traditions provide members with a purpose for their labor and a rather solid self-identity. They are roles and ways of living which are not without their joys as well as pains; and they are ways which are not always embraced with great enthusiasm. But the extended family experience is accepted by most members and is the most important source of self-respect they have.

As with their spouses, working class wives are family-oriented people. For most, the family roles of wife and mother are the only adult roles open to them. The women I spoke with, for instance, were not encouraged by parents and school authorities to embark on careers even when they showed talent. Said one:

> I never liked school. I didn't do well; I still can't spell. I am embarrassed by this, especially when I have to fill out forms. I never write letters. I found I had some talent in art, but my guidance counselor told me art is a hobby, not a job.

This woman eloped early in her senior year in high school.

Another woman told me: "At nineteen, when I got married, I thought marriage was the greatest way out." And married life has been fulfilling, at least in some ways, for these women. For them, married life is the only life worth living as an adult. They cannot imagine going through life alone, without spouses, children, all the relatives that an established marriage brings with it.

A spouse is the person to whom a woman can always turn when things go wrong at work, or with the children, or with other family members. Married life symbolizes adulthood and also the stability and community most of them say they want.

Children are viewed as the natural outcome of marriage, indeed, and especially for women, one of the central reasons for marriage. Children are important even though they often create pressures in the marriage. They are a drain on the family budget; and the same tight budget allows their parents few opportunities to take some time away from them.

But even though family roles are primary ones for most working class women, all of those with whom I spoke said that, had they to do it over again, they would wait a few years longer before getting married. They said either that they would work a little longer, or try to launch a career, or perhaps, go to college.

> But (and this came, invariably, in some form from every woman) I am <u>not</u> a woman's libber. I <u>would</u> get married, I could never go through life alone. I need my family, my husband, my kids. I need them for support, I guess. For me, marriage is not what I thought it was when I first got married, but it's the best relationship for me.

"Besides," most would continue, "who are they kidding? I work part-time and I'm exhausted. You can't tell me I could have a career, plus raise the kids, plus be the dream wife and housekeeper you see in these magazines."

Women's Liberation is conceived of as a movement which either puts unrealistic demands upon women or forces them to break family bonds. If women are to have careers (magazine stories to the contrary) someone else must assume the major responsibility of rearing the children, or

else childrearing must be postponed or rejected altogether.

What is more, a liberated woman, at least through these women's eyes, must be totally independent, most especially from her husband. It is a picture of womanhood most working class women have difficulty even imagining. There seems to be no place, at least in the popular conceptions of women's liberation movement, for the type of relationships most characteristic of working class family life; relationships of dependence, sometimes subordination, of long-term and extended commitments. It is not surprising that, as one woman said, "I just can't see myself in a life like that."

The image of the liberated woman is a threatening family image, as well as a foreign one, because as popularly expressed, it is a disparagement of those without career ambitions, of those women who are content to be housewives, and of those who sometimes bolster their husband's self-esteem at the expense of their own. Feminists who fail to understand the importance of the family to working class women, most especially how it is the institution which gives them their greatest sense of self, risk alienating most of this large group.

This near-blanket rejection of the women's liberation movement does not necessarily mean that working class women find no fault with their current way of life. Lillian Rubin found many instances of depression and anxiety in women she interviewed. Many women were discouraged at the lack of communication in their marriage; at the ambiguous sexual roles their husbands wished them to play; at the dull routine of keeping house and rearing the children; at the lack of help from their spouses.

But these arrangements are familiar and acceptable nevertheless, particularly when compared with the feminist alternative.

In sum, there are many pressures which encourage working class men and women to marry and form a particular way of life. The way of life, nevertheless, is generally acceptable to most, and provides its members with a sense of self and of self-respect. The roles, commitments, expectations which are characteristic of working class family life provide most of its members with their strongest identity.

This is not to say, again, that all members who identify with the roles, etc., actually fulfill the expectations inherent in them. For many reasons, including the possibility that other sources of self-identification are not readily available to most members of this class, some working class people do not actually live up to the obligations and commitments characteristic of the working class ideal.

Most of the people from whom this background was drawn seemed to be members of "settled" working class families, though there are hints which suggest otherwise. Again, I suspect that this is largely attributable to the fact that the family way of life in these instances was supported by lack of mobility and ethnic and religious traditions compatible with and supportive of this way of life.

The setting out of the main features of this way of life, even if not all members fully or even largely adhere to its principles, helps us to see how greatly it shapes the ideas and beliefs, indeed the self-understanding, of its participants. The understanding should help us see why abortion on demand is such a great threat to most members of this class. I shall turn, now, to an elaboration of this.

When Lillian Rubin was discussing a working class woman's early marriage (precipitated by pregnancy) with her, she asked the woman if she had ever considered having an abortion. The woman responded.

> Never, I could never do that. God, I remember how terrified I was. I kept thinking it couldn't be true, I remember even thinking that I would take my mom's car and drive it off a cliff. I knew he'd marry me. I never doubted that. But I didn't want to get married. I wanted to do things and to have things.[25]

Says Rubin, "Not one person, woman or man, even considered abortion - generally not because of religious scruples, but because the idea, they said, was 'disgusting,' 'not a choice'; or because it 'just never occurred to them.'"[26]

Rubin theorizes that these beliefs about abortion are encouraged by two circumstances. First, she believes that beliefs about abortion were more restrictive prior to 1973, because abortion was illegal in most circumstances then. All of the women with whom she spoke had their "problem" pregnancies prior to 1973; the other children born to the remaining men and women were born well before then also.

Rubin argues that their current beliefs are most likely attributed to the fact that abortions were illegal during their reproductive years. She expects these men and women to change their beliefs as abortion on demand becomes more acceptable; and younger working class men and women accept it more readily.

Rubin argues that the other reason the people she interviewed were so opposed to abortion even though the pregnancy occurred out of wedlock, was because the pregnancies were allowed to occur, however unconsciously, so the couple could marry and assume adult status in their respective families. For, as one of the men Rubin interviewed said,

"If a girl got pregnant, you married her. There wasn't no choice."[27]

In my own conversations with working class women, some of whom were pregnant when they married (and most of whom could have obtained a legal abortion), I did not find the more enthusiastic embrace of liberalized abortion laws which Rubin anticipated. I suspect that, in this instance at least, Rubin does not make the connection between abortion and the obligations and commitments which sustain working class family life.

In my conversations, I did find an unwillingness to acknowledge that all abortions were always wrong, and that women who have abortions were always making an immoral decision. Typical of conversations I had are these:

> I could never have an abortion. No, it's not for me. Why? I think it's a person. Having had a baby, I don't see how you make a decision that now it's a person and now it's not. It's a person from the very beginning - at least to me it is. When I was carrying Brandy, that's the way I thought of it.
>
> Now, that's just for me, and that's just in normal circumstances. If I had gotten measles or something, and the doctor said for sure I'd have a retarded child, I'd have to think for a long time, about having it. Probably we would, but, well, that's awfully hard.
>
> My friend, Mandy, got pregnant just about four months ago, and she had an abortion. She said it was because she couldn't afford to redecorate her apartment and have another baby. I don't know if that's really why, but if it is, I think that's wrong. I could never do that.

Would you ever join the Right-to-Life movement or a similar anti-abortion group?

> I don't think so. I'm not what you'd call political. I don't belong to any political groups. I usually don't even know when elections are. I just vote the way my husband tells me to.

> Abortion is personal, I think. In my family, you just don't have one. It's a baby from the very beginning, and everyone loves it way before it is born. No one would forgive you, I think, if you aborted it. You try to plan it so you can at least half-way afford a new baby; but if it happens by mistake, you'll manage somehow.

And another:

> When I found I was pregnant with Janice, I told David and he was thrilled. We got married right away. We never thought about abortion. We both think it's a person and that it would be wrong to kill it like that.
>
> In some ways, I have more confidence in myself because I had the baby. My parents practically disowned me; I was bored at home; and marriage wasn't what it was cracked up to be. But I made it.
>
> When Janice was born, I didn't love her. It's still hard for me to admit, but I didn't. I had to give up so much for her, I resented her a lot. One of my friends was pregnant when she got married and she felt the same way about her baby. We were so relieved to find out, we both started to cry. I mean, it's not that we hated the babies or anything. But carrying them was lonely and humiliating.

Did you ever consider abortion?

> No. Maybe because it was illegal, but I doubt it. We could have found someone to do it. We just felt that we had to take responsibility for what we did. I mean how could we kill a baby because we got caught. It wasn't her fault after all. No. We never really considered not having her. If I did have an abortion, I wouldn't have told anyone. Even now, I'd keep it a secret. I'd be too ashamed to let my family know.

In the conversations I had, abortion was always discussed as a procedure of desperation, and one which none of the women would consider for themselves. Every woman I spoke with gave the primary reason for her opposition to abortion on demand that to her and her spouse and family, the fetus was a person, and it's wrong to kill persons without good reason. Most could not come up with any good reasons except that if the health of the mother were endangered or there was "proof positive"

that the fetus would be born retarded.

Every woman went on to elaborate, once she stated her belief in the early personhood of the fetus, about how close she had felt to the developing fetus during each of her pregnancies. Most spoke of having prepared names for the babies well before they were born, and of the various emotional reactions of each of the relatives. Clearly, each baby was "part of the family" well before it was delivered.

None of the women considered abortion a matter they would decide upon alone. When I asked each of them if they would include their spouses in a decision to abort or not, most them reacted with a shocked, "Of course I would. Why wouldn't I? I mean, he's half of it. He has to support it and everything, right? It's just as much his as it is mine, right?"

A few of the women said they knew of women who had abortions, but most did not know anyone who had. These suspected that if any of their relatives or close friends had had an abortion, they would have kept the fact very confidential. For abortion was definitely an unacceptable method for dealing with a pregnancy, however, unwanted.

None of the women with whom I spoke was in any way involved in the public debate about abortion, though all of them were strongly opposed to family members taking advantage of liberal abortion laws. Some of the women were concerned that liberal laws were encouraging women to end pregnancies they might otherwise have come to accept and carry to term.

Most expressed concern that their own daughters would be tempted by such laws to abort unplanned pregnancies, though none could condone such action. They planned to help their daughters deal with their fertility

by giving them contraceptive information when they thought they needed it. All of the women insisted upon the distinction between contraception and abortion. They would tell their sons and daughters that while "in this day and age" they should know about methods of birth control, they should never think the family would condone an abortion by any of its members.

For the women I interviewed, liberal abortion laws, though generally tolerated, also seemed to threaten them.

The direct threat was, of course, that their daughters would be tempted into an abortion they could have performed with such ease. Such an act would be a challenge both to the parents and the values of sacrifice and respect they sought to encourage in their children. The indirect threat of liberal abortion laws was, as some implied, that their very existence challenged the commitments which sustain working class family life. In general, though, most of the discussion about abortion was a discussion of why it would have been impossible for the women themselves and their spouses to have considered having one.

For the women with whom I spoke, childbearing and childrearing were the most fulfilling activities in their lives. Most looked back to their pregnancies with great delight. "I felt very special when I was carrying my children. Everyone was always helping me and was very excited planning for the new baby. And I enjoyed having the babies inside me, guessing what they'd be like when they got older."

Even the woman who was depressed about her first, "accidental" pregnancy, spoke glowingly of her second.

Their pregnancies did not disturb careers, but began them. They

situated the married couple more firmly in the extended family with childrearing and bearing experiences to share, with clothes and furniture to be loaned to or borrowed from other family members.

Now I suspect that most of the women with whom I spoke would not have an abortion themselves. The systems of family supports, of ethnic traditions and religious commitments seem strong enough in most instances that the women would carry an unexpected pregnancy to term. But there are hints, even from these women, that perhaps they would not live up to the ideal (of respect for life) they publicly support.

Consider, for example, the woman who said that even if she had an abortion, she would not tell anyone; or the statements of every woman with whom I spoke that if someone they knew did have an abortion, most likely no one else would ever find out about it.

Consider, too, the words of one of the women Linda Bird Franke interviewed in the waiting room of an abortion clinic. The woman was waiting for her daughter to have an abortion:

> I was brought up to believe that intercourse was a sin before you are married, and I believed it and I still do. So, according to the Bible she has sinned. I think you are supposed to be married. That's the way I feel about it. And I told her that, but I guess she didn't pay no mind. We are church-going people and I take her there every Sunday. But I didn't talk to the preacher about it. Only her sisters and her brother and my mother know about it.....I told her it's murder to have an abortion.[28]

Clearly, the commitment to respect the fetus is shared by all of these women. It is an essential ingredient of their identity that they consider themselves and are considered by others to be gentle, reliable, self-sacrificing women.

It would be too simple, moreover, to conclude that working class

women who publicly oppose abortion but have them anyway, or working class men who publicly embrace family life but abuse their children, are irrational or deceitful.

Surely, this is sometimes the cause. But, a deeper explanation of the inconsistencies, I suggest, would first recognize the intimate connection which exists between the roles and expectations of the working class ideal of family life and their self-identifications. Then the explanation would recognize that the stability of this way of life is to an important extent contingent upon circumstances (lack of mobility, strong ethnic ties) which are increasingly difficult to maintain; and, finally, that other sources of self-identification are rare.

We can expect that most working class people who largely live up to the obligations and commitments inherent in their way of life to oppose liberal abortion laws because they threaten the family experience and values which shape their self-identity. We can also expect that members who share this self-identification, but who privately do not always live up to the ideal, will oppose such laws, perhaps even more vigorously than the others.

There are, then, at least two levels to working class anti-abortionism. They are linked by a common source of identity: the family way of life I have set out. The loss of this identity would, I suspect, be just as acute for those on both levels.

It seems likely that there is another level to working class life which includes members who are not opposed to abortion. Judith Blake's evidence suggests, for example, that while most working class people

are opposed to abortion, not all are.

I suspect that these members are much less likely to identify with the form of family life most characteristic of working class life. The neighborhood ties, stability, extended and close kinship ties, strong ethnic and religious traditions have eroded in some areas of the country, I suspect, and the obligations and commitments, including those which encourage opposition to liberal abortion laws, have less support. We can expect in such circumstances that these members will be much less likely to identify themselves primarily with the traditional way of family life and to defend that way of life against outside threats.

There are then, probably at least three levels within the working class itself with respect to the issue of abortion. And we can expect that the more closely members identify with the ideal of family life, whether or not they always, privately live up to the ideal, the more vociferous will be their opposition to liberal abortion laws.

Now, most feminists do not make this connection between self-identification and the ideal of family life. This encourages them to misinterpret opposition to liberal abortion laws.

The reasons most feminists give for supporting liberal abortion laws, for example, do not seem to pertain to working class women. Long-established or labored for careers will not be disturbed by an unexpected pregnancy. On the contrary, it is through childbearing that most working class women "come into their own" as women.

Also, most of these women consider the fetus a person from very early on, generally well before the third month of pregnancy. The

relationship between the working class mother and her fetus - a relationship of mutual dependence, of nurturance - may be thought of as a paradigm of working class family relationships. Most feminists do not speak of a relationship between the mother and fetus, preferring to consider both separate entities. What would be thought of as a minor surgical procedure (the abortion) by most feminists, would be a loss and a murder to most working class women.

Finally, building upon this, the fetus is not thought of by the working class woman as an individual with rights against her and other individuals with whom it happens to be involved. Family life is based, rather, upon a system of loyalties, obligations, trust, commitments, which preclude treating members solely as individuals with rights against one another.

Husbands and wives, their children, parents, and relatives are bound together in a unit which is rooted in mutual dependence and respect for all members. The respect extends to the dead in the family as well as to those not yet born into it. It is common to hear that "your grandfather would want you to do this if he were alive today," or "I visit aunt so-and-so because my mother always did; and she would be hurt if everyone forgot her old aunt." The present is shaped both by the past and the future.

Most of the women with whom I spoke mentioned that they are concerned that such respect for others and for our natural resources is diminishing. One woman, the most strongly opposed to liberal abortion laws, said that she felt tremendously "uncomfortable" about the effect such laws were "really having" on American women. "It probably seems

all right now, with all this women's lib and all; but I keep thinking that all of this wasting of life will catch up with us. I worry about it."

Said another woman: "I'm trying to get my kids to see how valuable everything is, to learn to make do. They're pretty spoiled in a lot of ways; but if they have to, if we have a depression, I know they'll be able to survive. I don't want them to get the idea that it's okay to be wasteful."

Every woman with whom I spoke had a vegetable garden in which she took great pride and delight. Said one: "I love to take care of this garden; it makes me feel good to think I helped make what we're having for supper. Besides, it helps out."

This respect for natural resources and concern about waste is compatible with the other concerns of working class family life. Indeed, it would be surprising to learn that members did not have such a concern for the immediate environment.

In the same way, the opposition to most instances of abortion is "compatible" with, indeed, required by, the way of life most working class people share. The opposition, at least for one's own members, accords with the values of respect and sacrifices for all members (including those not yet born) at the root of the family life. The opposition flows from a form of life shaped by a particular view of the past and future; of appropriate roles for all members; of standards of excellence, of respect, of worthiness.

The beliefs that members have about one another and about themselves help to constitute that way of life and their self-understandings.

These connections between self-interpretations, identity, and the beliefs which help to shape a way of life, emphasize the danger of trying to settle a controversy like abortion in abstraction from particular ways of life.

The purpose of this chapter was to suggest that working class anti-abortionism can be understood most fruitfully by understanding the way of life from which the beliefs flow. It is above all a family-centered ideal. Other institutions, such as work and politics (and with the possible exception of the Church) do not vie with the family for the personal and extensive commitments of its members.

The family, ideally, is the place where members find solace from the pressures and boredom of work: a place where, through marriage and starting a family of one's own, the status of adulthood is conferred; where members can find identity and purpose.

My interpretation of this way of life is an attempt to show that working class anti-abortionism "makes sense," is "rational" when understood from within the way of life itself. The standards which encourage and enable such a form of life necessitates opposition to most forms of abortion.

We do not have to argue, that all members of working class families do live up to the ideal. Recent child abuse and divorce statistics reveal that this is not so. It is, perhaps, more revealing to show that most working class people identify with the way of life, that the identification is primary, and that even though not all privately meet the obligations of the way of life, they can be expected nevertheless to oppose laws which threaten it.

Now, if, as I assume, anti-abortionism is intrinsic to this way of life, and if the way of life is prized or at least accepted by most of its members, there is a compelling reason to include these people as participants in the debate about liberal abortion laws.

Such laws threaten the values of respect for the fetus, of sacrifice for the family, of responsibility for all life one has created. Understanding the anti-abortionism in this light opens up several issues, not now discussed in the controversy which I shall explore in the next chapter.

NOTES

[1]Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[2]Peter Winch, The Idea of A Social Science (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1958).

[3]Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Science of Man" in Review of Metaphysics (Fall, 1972), 4-51.

[4]In most of the literature on working class people, definitions are generally quite loose. In general, members of this group have high school educations or less, jobs which require little or no skill, and are paid an hourly wage.

[5]National Gallop Survey, Gallop Monthly Opinion Index (November, 1974).

[6]National Opinion Surveys. March 1972-May 1972, in Peter Skerry, "The Class Conflict over Abortion," The Public Interest (Summer, 1978).

[7]Morton and Bernie Hunt, The Divorce Experience (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977).

[8]William Goode, After Divorce (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1956).

[9]Ruth and Henry Kempe, Child Abuse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 38.

[10]Vincent Fontana, M.D., Somewhere a Child Is Crying (New York: MacMillan, 1973).

[11]Lillian Rubin, Worlds of Pain (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 197.

[12]Sennett and Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 93.

[13]United States Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports. No. 90, December, 1973, p. 5.

[14]Flannagan and Cooley, Project Talent, One Year Follow-up Studies, Cooperative Research Project No. 2333, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, 1966. In Bowles, "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Hierarchial Division of Labor" in The Capitalist System, ed. Edwards, Reich, and Weisskopf (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 217.

[15]Sennett and Cobb, op. cit., p. 28.

[16]Ibid., p. 96.

[17]Ibid., p. 118.

[18]Rubin, op. cit., p. 167.

[19]Joseph Howell, Hard Living on Clay Street (New York: Anchor, 1973).

[20]Sennett and Cobb, op. cit., pp. 155-156.

[21]Rubin, op. cit., p. 167.

[22]Ibid., pp. 176-177.

[23]Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[24]Ibid., p. 40.

[25]Ibid., p. 66.

[26]Ibid., p. 67.

[27]Ibid., p. 67.

[28]Linda Bird Franke, The Ambivalence of Abortion (New York: Random House, 1978). Italics mine. pp. 214-215.

C H A P T E R I I I

POPULARIZED PRO-ABORTIONISM - A MINIMAL CRITIQUE

1. The Abortion Decisions

In its 1973 decision, Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court rejected Texas' claim that life begins at conception and that the state has the right, therefore, to protect such life by prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother. It rejected that claim, first, on the grounds that

> We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respectable discipline of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.[1]

And second,

> In areas other than criminal abortion, the law has been reluctant to endorse any theory that life, as we recognize it, begins before birth or to accord legal right to the unborn except in narrowly defined situations and except when the rights are contingent upon live birth.[2]

The Court concluded that the state does have a compelling interest in protecting potential human life, but only at viability, "because then the fetus has the capacity of meaningful life outside the mother's womb."[3]

And in Doe v. Bolton, the other 1973 abortion decision, the Court found unconstitutional some of Georgia's abortion regulations because they were not reasonably related to health of the mother.

These decisions, legalizing abortion on demand, were both the best and the worst possible decisions. They were the best for the

pro-abortionists because they were viewed as a humane, public and legal response to the problems of women's oppression, family instability, poverty and over-population. They were the worst for the country as a whole because they signalled to the pro-abortionists the end of the need to debate further the implications of liberal abortion laws. This withdrawal from public discourse has encouraged a deterioration of public debate and a weakening of the liberal position itself.

The possibilities for compromise, moreover, are dependent in part upon a resumption of debate, with particular emphasis on the status of the fetus, the use of abortion as a contraceptive of first resort, and the real intentions of those participants in the abortion controversy.

The 1973 decisions have resulted in great public access (particularly through the media) to arguments for abortion and very little to anti-abortionist positions. What is more, the pro-abortionist positions have been the subject of very little critique.

In this chapter, I shall explore the popularized version of pro-abortionism, particularly the characterization of most anti-abortionists as mean-spirited, religious males. I shall argue that this characterization is not only inaccurate, but also has the effect of pushing to the Right many working class anti-abortionists who would rather not make that move, and of diminishing the possibilities for compromise.

I shall elucidate the pro-abortionist position and offer a minimal critique of it. In the following chapter, I use the work of two prominent pro-abortionists to suggest that the popularized version of pro-abortionism is not only counter-productive, but also helps to undermine the very liberalism it explicitly celebrates.

2. Popularized Pro-abortionism

There are several key features of the popularized version which I shall examine in turn. The first is the argument that abortion on demand is the keystone to women's freedom.

According to most feminist writers, reproductive freedom is the key to achieving other freedoms. And the right to abortion on demand, as the guarantor of reproductive freedom, is the keystone to achieving equality, freedom, fulfillment for all women.

Gloria Steinem says, for instance, that:

> If we can't have power over our bodies from the skin in, how can we have power over our bodies from the skin out?... the demand for reproductive freedom, as an inalienable human right, has become the bottom line for women throughout the world. And abortion, as the contraceptive means of last resort becomes the crucial battleground.
>
> Never again can political leaders be allowed to call themselves friends of women, no matter what their positions are on other issues, unless they also support reproductive freedom on a basic human right. Our freedom and equality depend on it.[4]

And Lawrence Lader:

> For Women's Liberation, abortion became the great catalyst. Whether they aimed at moderate goals like job equality, or the complete dissolution of the nuclear family, the feminists quickly learned that all of their progress depended on a woman's control of her own body and fertility. The ultimate freedom remains the right of every woman to legalized abortion.[5]

And Betty Freidan:

> ...we have come to recognize that there is no freedom, no equality, no full human dignity and personhood possible for women until we have control over our own bodies.[6]

There are three reasons generally acknowledged for the importance of reproductive freedom to women's freedom in general.

First, there is the claim that a woman cannot be free if she does not have full control over her physical activity. This control is assumed to be basic, essential - a natural right of women. According to this claim, the state has no legitimate right to regulate what a woman can and cannot do with her own body. This claim is usually not argued, though it underpins most feminist arguments for elective abortion laws. And the right of women to control their own bodies is generally interpreted narrowly as the right to control their reproductive capacities.

The assumption that there can be no freedom for women until there is reproductive freedom is dependent upon the second claim. This is that reproduction narrows a woman's possibilities for developing fully all her talents. Reproduction can be burdensome, it is argued, because women are also the child-rearers, and childrearing itself is for the most part "narrow" and "degrading." Continuous and/or exclusive childrearing, it is claimed, discourages women from developing other capacities.[7]

The implicit assumption here is that every woman has talents to develop which are not exhausted by producing and raising her offspring; and that each woman is unfulfilled, unfree, to the extent that she is unable to explore these capacities.

A second aspect of the popularized version of pro-abortionism is the claim that women's reproductive systems have been and sometimes continue to be controlled by men to further their male interests and to inhibit women's development. There are several theories about why this has occurred.

Wendall Waters suggests, for instance, that abortion is denied

most women as a method of family planning because of "demographic aggression" of male political, religious, and economic leaders. This occurs even though the denial promotes serious physical, economic, and psychological problems for the women who bear unwanted children, and for the children themselves. Says Waters, "The feminists are perfectly correct when they declare that if men had to bear babies, compulsory pregnancy laws would have disappeared long ago."[8]

Waters suggests that the desires of male leaders for domination in their spheres have overwhelmed their senses of compassion for the burdens most women face when they bear children. He argues that these men have used their positions or power to force women to reproduce and that, until recently, women have been unable to respond.

Gloria Steinem and Garrett Hardin's claims are compatible with those of Water's. Steinem argues that since women's bodies are "society's most basic means of production," women's freedom to choose abortion is the freedom "most likely to be resisted by the patriarchal structures, regardless of their interest in population control or even in saving money." She continues:

> We produce the workers and the soldiers of the patriarchy and controlling our reproductive processes is the sole way that the growth and identity of a race or religion or nation can be assured (which is why the most racist societies - Hitler's Germany, for instance - have been the most opposed to abortion or other decision-making by women.[9]

And Garrett Hardin claims that the most important reason for opposition is that laws opposing abortion were made by men. Men, never having experienced the suffering of motherhood, not to mention the suffering of unwanted motherhood, are willing to allow women to experience this adversity. Hardin claims, in Mandatory Motherhood, that

if men were the ones to bear children, there would be no abortion laws.[10]

Other feminists suggest that opposition to abortion is part of a fear in men that women would threaten their power positions as they develop the talents which were untapped while they reared their offspring.

Evelyn Reed, for example, has argued that the opposition by the Catholic Hierarchy is motivated by a desire to control women lest they challenge the power of its members:

> By opposing and seeking to overthrow the Supreme Court decision (Roe v. Wade) the Catholic hierarchy is striving to keep all women in the same status as animal females who are subjected by nature to uncontrolled procreation. They are determined to continue to rob women of their basic human right - the right to control.[11]

This, according to Reed, is because the hierarchy is concerned that if

> women gain control over their bodies, they will forthwith proceed to fight for full control over their minds and lives.[12]

A third aspect of the pro-abortionist argument is that working class people, particularly working class women, are opposed to abortion because they mistakenly assume that the consequences of a decline of traditional families (presumably hastened by elective abortion) would be disastrous for them. For the traditional family, in this version, is a miniature of the patriarchal system and is perpetuated by the manipulations of male political, religious, and economic leaders to the detriment of working class people.

Alan Hunter and Linda Gordon argue that the leaders of the New Right play on the fears of working class people that without the traditional family compassion and solace from the work world will be nowhere to be found. The New Right leaders intentionally obscure the

way the family oppresses women and encourages men to think of their futures as unchangeable.[13]

Andrea Dworkin also argues that women on the Right like Ruth Carter Stapleton and Anita Bryant (now repentant) manipulate family symbols and encourage women to continue to play their traditional roles (particularly procreative roles) even though this type family victimizes women.[14]

The popularized version of pro-abortionism also suggests that most, if not all, anti-abortionists are not ignorant of the consequences anti-abortionism has for some men and all women; they are, rather, vicious, insensitive and unreasonable. The gist of the argument is that since elective abortion is so overwhelmingly popular, those who oppose it must also oppose the spirit of democratic rule and the humane objectives of elective abortion.

Karen Mulhauser, Executive Director of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), says,

> With fanatical zeal, and backed by hundreds of thousands of dollars, the so-called 'right to life' forces have made major advances in their current attack of those women least able to defend themselves: the poor.[15]

A recent NARAL newsletter suggested that those who oppose abortion on demand are "repressive," "antichoice," and "inhumane" in allowing unwanted children to be born.

To these claims is often added the charge of insincerity: that those who oppose abortion on demand on the grounds that the fetus is a person with the right to live also support capital punishment and did support the war in Viet Nam.[16]

Garrett Hardin suggests that those who insist that unwanted or possibly defective infants to be born do so "because it is easy to bear the adversity of another." Gloria Steinem likens societies without liberal abortion laws to Hitler's Germany.[17]

Samuel Bair, in his book Abortion: A Woman's Choice, says that there are three groups of people who oppose liberal abortion laws. The first group includes those who are opposed on religious grounds. This group, he insists, is a very tiny minority whose views, moreover, should not be considered in a democracy (where Church and State properly separate). The second group includes those who "cannot identify with a woman in distress." Finally, there are those who "visualize elevating their personal moral stature before others and themselves."[18]

Bair concludes that the totality of all three groups is a small minority, though members are well-financed and vociferous.

Bair also states that

> The real problems of an unwanted pregnancy for someone who can barely support an existing family have never interested the opponents of abortion...Beneath the clamoring righteousness, there is a silent iceberg of suffering, and the anti-abortionists prove their lack of respect for the tragedies they cause.[19]

Laura Shapiro, a feminist writer, in Mother Jones, shares Bair's assumptions about the inhumanity of most anti-abortionists. She characterizes the abortion opposition as coming from "fanatics" and those who have brought abortionists to trial "manic and vengeful."[20]

In the growing body of literature promoting liberal abortion laws, there is little, if any, sympathy extended those who oppose the laws. With the exception of passing mention of those who consider the fetus a person, most pro-abortionists writing on the subject charge that anti-

abortionists are motivated by a contempt for those who suffer because their pregnancies are unwanted.

Finally, the popularized version of pro-abortionism insists that the fetus's right to life is far surpassed by the harm that inevitably would come to it, its mother, and the rest of society by virtue of its being unwanted.

Some of the assumptions which support this goal are first, that it is the poor who are most disadvantaged by unwanted pregnancies. Already financially strapped, additional offspring only exacerbate an already difficult way of life. For these people, abortion would be the great equalizer:

> Prior to the liberalization of New York's abortion law, the total fertility rate of blacks was 2.85, as compared to 2.15 for whites...In the course of just 18 months, the...rate of blacks fell to 2.11, the replacement level, while white fertility declined much more modestly to 1.84...The evidence is compelling that...by enabling blacks to avert what must have been a considerable number of unwanted births, and thereby reproduce at a rate more compatible with the well-being of the family unit, abortion legalization may rank as one of the greatest social equalizers of our time.[21]

Second, it is assumed that elective abortion would spare unwanted offspring the less than fulfilling life which seems to be their lot. The evidence, universally cited here, is a Swedish study which compared two hundred and twenty boys and girls born in 1961-1963 to women who were denied legal abortions twice during the same pregnancy, with an equal number of children whose mothers did not request abortions. The researchers concluded that those children whose mothers had been declined abortions suffered "higher incidence of illness and hospitalization... slightly poorer school marks and performance (and) a somewhat worse integration in the peer group."[22]

Third, abortion is assumed to spare the mother psychological and emotional trauma.

In sum, the popularized version of pro-abortionism is: that an overwhelming majority of Americans support a woman's right to choose abortion; that the bearing and rearing of children drains women of their natural talents; that conservative anti-abortion laws originated in attempts by men to suppress women, and their liberalization signals an end to oppression; that some in the higher echelons of religious, economic, and political power continue to manipulate working class people into supporting the destructive conservative laws despite the harm it does them; that aside from the manipulated, those who continue to support conservative laws are inhumane, power-hungry, well-heeled fanatics; and finally, that the physical and emotional harm incurred by the mother, child and rest of society by an unwanted pregnancy carried to term far surpasses the right of the fetus to be born alive.

3. A Minimal Critique of Pro-Abortionism

There is a minimal critique of this position which I shall offer now and which I shall build upon in the next chapter.

The assumption that a substantial majority of Americans supports abortion on demand appears, as I have already suggested, more and more dubious. While there is unquestionably wide support for some forms of abortion, the beliefs of most Americans are full of nuance and limitations not taken into account by most pro-abortionists. But given the importance of this claim to their case, we should expect some serious attention given to its documentation. We have special reason to expect documenta-

tion given to their claims that the new support for abortion on demand is due, in large part, to a recent major change in men's beliefs about women. But there is, by and large, little attention paid to the massive changes in ideas and beliefs which must have occurred very recently for there to be widespread support for elective abortion laws.

One of the only writers who tries to account for it is Lawrence Lader, who says that prior to 1968, "the most puzzling issue in the revolt against abortion laws (was) why women suffered quietly for so long. A leaden apathy suffocated all protest, even though birth control had reached respectability by 1935 and other nations had completely legalized abortion."[23]

Lader's account of the abortion movements during the late 1960's is focused, for the most part, on those women who "came out" for abortion when they joined the Women's Liberation Movement. He argues that these women, especially feminist leaders like Germaine Greer, realized that the key to all liberation was a woman's right to control her own body and that this must include the right to elective abortion. Lader argues that these women educated other women to these facts and "mobilized them from their apathy."

But Lader's account is limited by its focus on these feminist leaders. He does not explain how these women generated support from men and women not involved in or even opposed to the feminist cause. Lader is surely aware of these people, and that they are substantial numbers, as he documents many instances where feminist pro-abortion activities were disrupted by large numbers of male and female opponents.

Garrett Hardin suggests that male leaders finally realized that

without elective abortion, the earth's "carrying" or survival capacity would be threatened seriously.[24]

For the most part, though, the question of change is not explored. Most writers merely assume that beliefs changed, and changed radically, that male leaders from all spheres, and members of the general public, changed their minds about elective abortion. And that the reproductive freedom implied by elective abortion will encourage a reformulation of the goals of our patriarchal system, promoting full self-realization for women.

These accounts surely lose some of their explanatory power by not having explored the enormous changes which must have occurred. We are left with the conclusion that, for some reason or reasons, men who previously wanted only to exploit women, now do not. And women who could be manipulated into thinking that such exploitation was in their best interests, came to a "true consciousness" - all sometime during the years 1968-1972, when public opinion allegedly shifted overwhelmingly to support abortion on demand.

The across-the-board inattention given to reasons for supposed changes most people underwent about liberal abortion laws is important not only because of the lack of plausibility it gives most pro-abortionist accounts, but also because those accounts are used commonly to legitimate assumptions and beliefs about the alleged minority which still opposed elective abortion.

A second reason for criticism is the fact that most of the women having abortions are using no form of contraception. Every estimate of which I am aware suggests that most women having abortions, at <u>least</u> 90%,

were using no method of contraception whatsoever at the time of conception. These women were not, for the most part, contraceptively ignorant. Abortion was their chosen method of contraception.[25]

Implicit in the pro-abortionist argument is the assumption that men and women have contraceptive responsibilities as well as contraceptive rights. This position is not explicitly argued, though almost without exception feminists condemn those women who use abortion as a method of birth control. The implicit assumption that abortion is morally different from mechanical means of contraception, and the explicit assumption that abortion is an unqualified right has created an ambivalence about abortion which, if examined, can illuminate some of the weaknesses in the liberal position.

The demand by feminists that women treat decisions to abort with moral gravity makes sense only if they assume, on some level, that the fetus is a person worthy of respect. This implicit assumption of fetal personhood creates ambivalence about the decision to abort which is apparently quite common.[26] There is a strain in trying to maintain that abortion is an unqualified right of women while in practice acting as if it is a serious decision which should be qualified by a consideration of the life inside the pregnant woman. This ambivalence extends to the general reluctance of feminists to accept and condone the practical, logical implications of some of their arguments.

As Paul Ramsey observes, most good arguments for unrestricted abortion are also good arguments for infanticide. Yet, philosophers like Michael Tooley, who do draw out the abortion arguments to include arguments for infanticide, have few supporters in theory and fewer in practice.

Tooley argues, for example, that the feminist argument that women have the right to rid themselves of that which is dependent upon them must also include the breastfed infant (particularly the infant whose survival depends on breast milk for nourishment). In fact, most newborns are as dependent upon the mother for their survival outside the womb as they were inside it. So, logically, this argument for abortion should include the option of infanticide.[27]

The same is true of the requirement set by many feminists that abortion can be performed without restriction on the developing fetus because it has not yet acquired the status of personhood which entitles it to the right of life. Personhood, for most feminists, is defined as "self-consciousness."

Yet, it is hard to argue, says Tooley, that the newborn baby has any more self-consciousness than the infant in utero. In fact, it often takes months for the infant to establish that it is a being independent of its mother. Yet, only one feminist I have encountered supports infanticide as a logical implication of feminist abortion arguments (and her support is very qualified in practice).[28] Even Tooley won't condone the killing of toddlers, though that is certainly compatible with his requirement of legitimate infanticide.

This weakness in the popularized version of pro-abortionism accentuates aspects of it which can be criticized. First, the failure to include the implicit assumption of fetal personhood as a premise in the argument for elective abortion contributes to the public legitimation of abortion as a method of contraception of first resort and not a procedure which kills a living being. This legitimation is at odds with

feminists' insistence that women treat the decision to abort as a moral decision and the withdrawal of legitimacy could reduce abortions substantially.

Second, although most pro-abortionists assume, on some level, that the fetus is a creature worthy of at least grave consideration before it is killed, the assumption is at odds with the 1973 Supreme Court decisions which are always used to justify the existence of elective abortion. These decisions cannot justify even the feminist argument that women should "agonize" before they abort. The decisions have almost no legal, medical, philosophical, religious, or scientific supporters, and it is worth detailing why this is so.

Baruch Brody has argued that while it was the intention of the Supreme Court to stay neutral about the humanity of the fetus, its decisions assume, in fact, that the early fetus is not human.[29] The Court's decision that because those trained in the discipline of theology, philosophy, and medicine were unable to arrive at a consensus on the status of the unborn fetus, there are no grounds for establishing personhood, was very weak. Even prominent pro-abortionists have rejected it.

Bernard Nathanson is the most prominent, perhaps, of the supporters of elective abortion to reconsider his position and push publicly for more conservative laws. He, and others like him, have been affected by recent developments in fetology (fetal development) to which the Court had access, but which the Justices chose not to include in their decisions.

Those working in the field of fetology have established that within eighteen days after conception, the fetal heart begins to work. By the

fortieth day, there is brain activity. By the tenth week, the fetus is able to move its own arms and legs, and suck its thumb, swallow amniotic fluid, squint and make a fist. The fetus, from very early on, has most, if not all, of the capacities which the late fetus and newborn infant have.

The Court argued that the state does have some obligations to protect the "viable" fetus, which it stated came into existence in the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy. But Brody and Nathanson suggest that there are at least two major weaknesses in this position. The first is that, since the fetus which can survive outside the womb is not significantly different from that which cannot, the Court actually made no contribution to establish grounds for personhood, and ignored evidence which could have laid a solid foundation for future decisions.

The second major weakness was in using the concept "viability" at all. Advances in the field of fetology have suggested for quite some time that "viability" is a much more fluid concept than these lawmakers suggest. In the early 1970's, for example, it was possible to save routinely a twenty-seven week old (two pound) fetus, while it is not uncommon now to save fetuses much smaller than two pounds.

The viability of the fetus is much better established in terms of its weight (in grams) and the availability of resources to save it. (The same infant may be viable in one location but not in another hospital in the same city.)

What is more, Nathanson argues that in making their decision about the viability of the fetus, the Justices used the same evidence as did the New York Legislature to arrive at the age of twenty-four weeks.

(In both instances, he says, the decision-makers merely "split the difference" between Old English Common Law which set viability at twenty-eight weeks, and the old New York law which set it at twenty weeks.[30]) The Court's decisions were strictly political compromises with no moral import. This is surely at odds with the implicit assumptions of most pro-abortionists.

Finally, the tendency of most pro-abortionists to insinuate that working class anti-abortionism is a product of ignorance and manipulation, may well contribute toward pushing these people further to the Right than they would really prefer to go.

The assumption that traditional family forms are totally repressive, that religious beliefs are superstitious and those who have them are victims of the powerful, and that religious beliefs, even if accorded some legitimacy, should not be acted upon in the political sphere, have done more to push people to the New Right than they have done to push them to the Left.

Anyone who has spent time with working class people would know that there are, at the very least, some joys to family life, some pleasures in bearing and rearing children; and that working class women have many ways to work around spouses that are "paternalistic." And the across-the-board denigration of religious beliefs and insistence that it cannot be expressed politically is both ungenerous to human and religious history (to say the least) and an affront to principles of religious tolerance.

Finally, the tendencies of contemporary liberals, like Dworkin, Hunter, and Gordon, to accord little or no legitimacy to the New Right might have the unintentional consequence of encouraging more men and

women in that direction.

For while these writers understand that the New Right, on one level at least, appeals to traditional family values, patriotism, the importance of religious beliefs, they do not entertain the possibility that these beliefs might well be legitimate, even necessary to a particular way of life.

This tendency to interpret the New Right as irrational is particularly evident, as I have argued, in their approach to anti-abortionism. These liberals characterize it, and its proponents, as inhumane or ignorant, dismissing the respect for the unborn which most often energizes anti-abortionists.

Traditional working class people already find little or no institutional support for their beliefs in a society guided by liberal theory and practice; and policies based on interpretations like Dworkin, Gordon, and Hunter's are likely to encourage their move to groups which accord some legitimacy to their beliefs. This occurs, even if on another level, the New Right is dangerously superficial and insulated.

In the absence of an alternative expression of the beliefs which support a traditional way of life, and with the realistic expectation that these beliefs will be misinterpreted and treated with hostility by contemporary liberals, we can expect more and more working class people to be attracted to the New Right.

The most promising possibility for countering the dangers of the Right, as well as the sterility of the abortion debate, lies in liberals re-engaging in debate some of the beliefs which comprise the working class way of life.

4. Summary

To sum, then, the 1973 Supreme Court decisions on abortion encouraged pro-abortionists to cut off debate with anti-abortionists. There are good reasons for arguing that this may have been premature. The popularized version of pro-abortionism is subject to criticism which, if confronted, might suggest areas such as stressing contraceptive responsibility, and the personhood of the fetus, which could encourage both pro- and anti-abortionists to compromise.

A more in depth appreciation and critique of the popularized version of anti-abortionism suggests that the areas for compromise might be greater than most participants would suspect as one explores the ways pro-abortionists are implicitly dependent on the traditional family life their position challenges. I shall concentrate on this in my next chapter.

NOTES

[1]Roe v. Wade, 41 LW 4227.

[2]Roe, 41 LW 4228.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Gloria Steinem, "Abortion Alert," MS (November, 1977), p. 118.

[5]Lawrence Lader, Abortion II: Making the Revolution (Boston: Beacon, 1973), p. 210.

[6]Friedan, op. cit., p. 123.

[7]Evelyn Reed, "Why the Catholic Hierarchy Opposes Women's Rights to Abortion" in Abortion and the Catholic Church: Two Feminists Defend Women's Rights (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), pp. 3-6.

[8]Wendell Waters, Compulsory Parenthood: The Truth About Abortion (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 243.

[9]Steinem, op. cit., p. 6.

[10]Garrett Hardin, Mandatory Motherhood.

[11]Reed, op. cit., p. 6.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter, "Sex, Family and the New Right: Anti-Feminism as a Political Force," Radical America (Winter, 1977-1978), pp. 10-11.

[14]Andrea Dworkin, "What the Right Offers Women," MS (June, 1979).

[15]NARAL Newsletter (Spring, 1979).

[16]Barbara Grizuti Harrison, "On Reclaiming the Moral Perspective," MS (June, 1978), pp. 40-42.

[17]Hardin, Mandatory Motherhood, and Steinem, op. cit.

[18]Samuel Bair, A Woman's Choice (New York: Rawson, 1977), p. 250.

[19]Ibid., p. 227.

[20]Laura Shapiro, "Abortion: Back to Square One," Mother Jones (September/October, 1977), pp. 13-14.

[21]Marcia Kramer, "Legal Abortion Among New York City Residents: An Analysis According to Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics," Family Planning Perspectives (May/June, 1975), p. 129.

[22]Dvtrc, Matvcek, Schuller, David and Friedman, "Children Born to Women Denied Abortion," Family Planning Perspectives (July/August, 1975), p. 165.

[23]Lader, op. cit., p. 30.

[24]Garrett Hardin, The Limits of Altruism: An Ecologist's View of Survival (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1976).

[25]Kristin Luker, Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision Not to Contracept (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[26]Linda Bird Franke, The Ambivalence of Abortion (New York: Random, 1977); Badgley Report (Study by the Canadian Government, 1976), p. 341.

[27]Michael Tooley, "Abortion and Infanticide," Philosophy and Public Affairs (Fall, 1972).

[28]Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," Monist (Fall, 1972).

[29]Baruch Brody, Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life: A Philosophical View (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975).

[30]Bernard Nathanson, Aborting America (New York: Doubleday, 1979).

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPLICIT SIDE OF PRO-ABORTIONISM: A CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM

There is a liberal vision implicit in most pro-abortion arguments which is largely unexplored. Examining the vision is important because the implicit aspects of it are at odds with other, more prominent features of the vision.

In this chapter, I shall explore this feature of pro-abortionism by focusing on two prominent pro-abortionists: Judith Jarvis Thompson and Garrett Hardin. Thompson is a feminist and philosopher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who has written extensive justifications for the right of women to abortion on demand. Hardin is a biologist who is widely acknowledged as a defender of abortion rights.

The two complement one another - Thomson focusing on a defense of individual rights, and Hardin concentrating on the non-personhood of the fetus (at least in its early states of development) and the demographic necessity of elective abortion.

I shall argue that both celebrate a vision of liberalism that has implicit social requirements which escape both and which could undermine that vision. And I shall argue that both Hardin and Thompson, assuming the neutrality of the social observer, have, in fact, universalized their own positions and misinterpreted other ways of life. Finally, I shall suggest that the implicit side of liberalism could, if acknowledged, contribute toward the development of a morally informed political compromise which would receive broad support.

1. Garrett Hardin

Garrett Hardin's arguments for abortion are particularly compelling to explore because he insists upon what many other feminists and population planners only imply. The explicitness of his position enables us to explore at length an issue which is an increasing embarrassment to pro-abortionists, particularly population planners. This is the fact that having argued for so long that all women have the right to reproductive freedom of choice, they are now suggesting (because the population did not significantly decrease) that reproductive freedom is more a privilege than a right.

This dilemma is instructive because it illuminates the way pro-abortionists, particularly planners, rely on traditional values which their explicit policies undermine. Let us consider Hardin's arguments for abortion.

The tone, the stress, of Hardin's arguments for abortion have shifted dramatically in the last decade as have the tone and stress of the family and population planning organizations he often represents. From arguing that women should be allowed to have abortions for their own well-being and the good of society, Hardin has begun to argue that women should be forced to have abortions, perhaps be sterilized, when the population cannot bear any more growth.

Hardin acknowledges that he has made some changes in his "policy recommendations" because women did not rush to have abortions (when services for them were made widely available) in numbers great enough to check the population growth.

Hardin concludes that women are acting selfishly and that the state has the right, indeed the duty, to coerce women to act in the public interest. Hardin is currently working for laws which would force women to become sterilized after each had had child. He insists that women undergo the procedure because "divorce and remarriage have played havoc with assigning responsibility to men. Biology makes women responsible."[1]

Hardin is aware that his policy for sterilization can be thought of as a limitation of freedom, but he argues that freedom is really "the recognition of necessity." And it is necessary that women cease reproducing at the current rate.

The state has a right to make such a policy because it assumes a significant part of the costs of childrearing and because the chromosomes given to the child at conception are not merely the parents but are "only part of the community's store."[2]

There are two keys to understanding what encouraged Hardin to move from a position which, at least implicitly, characterizes women as irresponsible citizens. The first is his notion of society's "carrying capacity." The "carrying capacity" is the level in a society at which the population and resources available to keep it thriving are equal.

Now, according to Hardin, some societies are reckless in their attempts to equalize resources and those who make use of them. These societies have stern choices to make: either they can continue in the current direction, taxing their "carrying capacity" and moving inevitably toward mass starvation and death; or they can force members to limit population growth through sterilization, abortion, euthanasia.

According to Hardin, there is a direct correlation between the standard of living desired and the number of people in any particular society: the higher the desired standard of living, the fewer people the society will be able to successfully accommodate. "Higher," for Hardin, in interpreted as higher levels of education, technology, energy usage, skill differentiation.

Those who try to tamper with the Hardin's law of "carrying capacity" will be undermined by it. So, for example, those altruists, who insist upon aiding countries where starvation is a persistent problem, are only prolonging an inevitable collapse and jeopardizing their own standards of living. Difficult as it may be for such altruists to swallow, such countries can be helped only by allowing their least able members to die.

Hardin argues that nature does not tolerate the weak, and intelligent human beings should not either.

> It should be clear by now that a belief in the 'sanctity of life' find no support in Nature, if that belief is the justification for cherishing the life of each and every individual human being above all goods. As far as Nature is concerned, the individual life is cheap, very cheap. Nature (to continue the personification) seeks to conserve something much more subtle. It may be that human policy should be dominated by the concept of the sanctity of life (though Hardin thinks it would be irrational to act in this way) but if so, not with the support of biology.[3]

Though Hardin's views might not on reflection be embraced by other population planners, they make explicit assumptions other planners hold only implicitly. Most planners assume with Hardin, for example, that upper class Americans have the highest standard of living in the world, and that our "carrying capacity" should be one with more of these highly educated, highly paid, highly consumption-oriented citizens. They

emphasize curtailing the number and controlling for the quality of citizenry, rather than scaling down consumption and encouraging other standards of "the good life."

Hardin and others also assume no connection between hunger and shortages in other nations and our own abundance. Hardin insists that Americans have simply been more shrewd and more realistic about developing a high quality "carrying capacity."

Most family and population planners also assume, with Hardin, that attempts by the state to shape our "carrying capacity" in specific directions will place the same burdens on all citizens, since they assume that all would benefit equally from higher standards and are equally disadvantaged when the population grows beyond a certain limit.

These assumptions have encouraged planners to assume that most citizens would be only too willing to do what is necessary to limit growth and thereby improve the quality of their lives.

These assumptions have encouraged them as well to investigate only minimally the public response to abortion on demand. Most planners assume citizens would, of course, support such a policy. Working with these assumptions, most family and population planners are beginning to argue that those who continue to oppose elective abortion laws are acting irrationally.

Most planners appear to share Hardin's convictions about America's ideal "carrying capacity," as well as his assumption that public-spirited, sensible citizens would embrace elective abortion as the most humane means for achieving this ideal. Faced with increasing intransigence on the part of anti-abortionists, and continued population growth, many

planners have joined Hardin in his shift of emphasis away from the humanity of abortion to its necessity. And women, once viewed as victims of male dominance and religious fanaticism are increasingly viewed as menaces to the well-being of American society.

The second key to understanding this shift is in the apparent contradiction in Hardin's arguments for abortion on demand.

On the one hand, for example, Hardin states that the only one with any right to make the decision to continue her pregnancy is the pregnant woman herself.

> No one, I will argue, whether husband, parent, father of her child, or a representative of the community, should have the slightest right to deny her. The right to abortion should be hers and hers alone.[4]

And,

> There should not be the slightest communal concern when a woman elects to destroy the life of her thousand-of-an-ounce embryo.[5]

Hardin justifies his argument by claiming that pregnancy and childbirth are forms of servitude which eat up "the best years of a woman's life," and that women cannot be forced into slavery in a just society.[6]

On the other hand, Hardin suggests that,

> Whatever our personal tastes in sex education for the future, surely this much is clear: that we must more and more emphasize the non-right of the individual woman to continue a pregnancy in utter disregard for the significant persons in her life: her parents, boyfriend, or her husband, and even society as a whole, since many of the costs of rearing and educating a child must be borne by society at large. These at least she must consider: but above all these she must consider the interest of the child who will come into being if she allows the pregnancy to continue.
>
> If the total circumstances are such that the child born at a particular time and under a particular circumstances will not receive a fair shake in life, then she should know, she

should feel in her bones - that she has no right to continue her pregnancy.[7]

On the face of it at least, it seems as though Hardin is arguing both that the mother has an absolute right to decide whether or not to continue her pregnancy and also that she does not. Hardin's claims can be clarified, I think, by examining some of the assumptions only implicit in his arguments.

Hardin's claims are held together by the implicit assumption that in every society there is a common good and that after a fashion most members will recognize what it is and act in accordance with its fulfillment.

With respect to abortion, as I have already suggested, Hardin assumes that the best society is one in which all children are wanted by their mothers and by those others burdened with their support. Hardin is fond of quoting Margaret Sanger: "The first right of every child is to be wanted, to be desired, to be planned, with an intensity of love that gives it its title to being." Hardin says, too, that the welfare of the potential child is the most important criterion in the decision to abort.[8]

Now, consider the hypothetical decision-making process of a pregnant woman acting on Hardin's assumptions. The woman does not take her pregnancy for granted, but considers above all else whether or not the child is really wanted.

A child that is really wanted, Hardin implies, is when all of those involved in its future rearing and support are able and willing to give it all it needs to lead a quality of life. This means that the child must have a better-than-average chance of being healthy and intelligent, and must not be a financial, physical, or emotional burden on its parents,

grandparents, or the state.

In order to make this important decision (and it is hers to make) the woman must first imagine this young fetus as her future child. She must envision her life and that of her parents and spouse as it would probably unfold with this child.

She considers, too, the ability of the state to provide the resources her child will need to lead a "quality" life. She must ask if there are enough schools, jobs, recreational facilities for this child, and if they are of good quality.

Presumably, after the pregnant woman has thought through the future of her fetus with respect to all those largely involved in its care, she will "feel in her bones" whether or not she should carry it to term.

Let us consider now, at another level, what Hardin assumes this woman will do. He assumes that she will be willing and able to form an imaginary relationship with her fetus, even more, that she will have enough affection and respect for it that she would not allow it to be born unless it had a high probability of sustaining not only her love and regard but also those of its immediate caretakers.

In brief, she must take into careful consideration the probable future of an unborn child and imagine its probable relationships and experiences with its future world. She must be capable of forming a bond, however tenuous, with her unborn child and of assessing its probable future in the community.

Next, Hardin assumes that the woman has ties with her natural family and that they have obligations toward her potential child. These ties, moreover, are sufficiently solid and affectionate that the preg-

nant woman would be able to judge accurately their willingness and ability to support this child in the necessary ways. He is assuming here that the society and the social relationships which characterize it are stable enough that the mother is able to predict with some certainty the future of her unborn child.

Finally, Hardin assumes that the potential mother is an intelligent and loyal citizen. She is capable of judging the state's ability to care for this particular child. And she is sufficiently dutiful as a citizen that she can balance her own wishes against those of members of her society and act in the common good - which may or may not be compatible with her own particular desires.

Hardin assumes, to sum, that the pregnant woman is able to empathize with others and that she is able to put their collective needs above her own individual desires, at least in important instances. She is able to make important moral decisions with a degree of selflessness. She is able to form bonds with her unborn child and to make a reasonably accurate assessment of its future.

Hardin assumes, too, that the mother will make the "right" decision with respect to her fetus. The decision will be so obvious, once she has reflected sufficiently that she will, says Hardin, "feel it in her bones."

So, when Hardin argues that it is the mother who has the ultimate and absolute right to decide whether or not to abort, he is assuming that the decision will be made on the basis of how wanted it is by its future caretakers and that most pregnant women are qualified to make this assessment.

Most decisions to abort, in Hardin's view, are made to spare the child an unfair life and its caretakers a burden.

Now, the right to decide is contingent upon, based upon, the assumption that the mother has these qualities of other regard and intelligence, and that she brings them to bear in her decision to abort. Presumably, mothers without these qualities do not have the right. This, though, is only implicit in Hardin's thought.

It is easy to get the impression, at first, that Hardin's theory of rights is based on individualist principles: the woman, after all, is granted the right to decide without any interference from others. But when we explore what Hardin sees as essential to any decision to abort, we see that he actually assumes that a profoundly social experience underpins the right to decide.

In Hardin's view, the right to decide is based on the woman's capacity and willingness to respond to family and community needs and wants and to those of her future child, as well as to her own wants and needs.

This is why a woman does not take into account all of these, forfeits her right to decide in Hardin's view. What is more, we can expect that should it be in the interests of society, any particular society, to expand its population, most women would be willing to support the expansion with decisions not to abort.

Hardin himself does not suggest or explore what social situations, practices, and institutions, encourage the qualities he assumes most citizens possess. But we can state that there must be at least a certain amount of stability in social relationships and a slow rate of social change if these women are going to be able really to predict their

unborn's future. There must as well be considerable legitimacy to the state.

Implicit in Hardin's vision is an ideal of family life where families are stable, loyal to other members, and rarely disrupted by changes in traditions and convention; where families are encouraged to maintain their privacy with the reasonable assurances that they will rarely be interfered with by the state, whose largest responsibility is to protect and preserve the way of life.

On the other hand, Hardin is committed to policies which inhibit the maintenance of that way of life. In The Limits of Altruism, Hardin commits himself to policies of equal opportunity, unlimited growth, unrestrained exploitation of our natural resources, and the widest possible extension of individual rights.[9] And, particularly in his early defense of abortion, Hardin celebrates the liberal view of family life which Alan Carlson nicely elaborates.

Carlson argues that in their attempts to be fair, liberals have allowed "any human relationship involving cohabitation that produces self-gratification and sexual fulfillment some claim to valid family status."[10] The concepts of "immorality" or "deviant family behavior" have no purchase in the explicit liberal agenda.

The liberal agenda celebrates these values for family life:

1. Mutability. There are no constants in moral questions nor in personal relationships.

2. Choice. There should be no bias towards marriage and children. Everything is open. All habitual and cultural attitudes may be questioned. All values are on trial.

3. Experimentation. Since there are no family or sexual norms, no traditions worthy of universal emulation, and no restraints, persons must be free to experiment with a variety of sexual partners and practices to find the sexual and family lifestyles appropriate for themselves.

4. Self-fulfillment. Morality demands freedom for people to realize their own potentials - and their own needs, desires, and tastes - with a minimum of social rules and regulations. Relationships should last only so long as they are mutually self-fulfilling.

5. Uninhibited sexuality. Sexual gratification represents one of life's ultimate values. Access to regular sexual gratification should be viewed as a basic human right. There is no true humanness devoid of sexuality.

6. The problem of children. Sexuality must be viewed as totally separated from procreation. Parenthood should be undertaken only after a careful weighing of social, cultural, and economic costs. The burden of social proof is shifted away from the right of persons to procreate. Given the problem of overpopulation, reproduction may have to be viewed as a privilege granted by a government working towards the goals of decreasing the quantity while increasing the quality of humankind. Unwanted pregnancies should be aborted.

At least some aspects of the liberal agenda for the family endorse ways of life which celebrate individual fulfillment over long-term commitment; immediate pleasure over the sometimes turbulent task of childrearing; abandonment of all norms over the pursuit of a particular ideal.

There are good reasons for arguing that explicit liberal agenda is incompatible with the maintenance of strong social bonds, loyalty to other generations and the state, and feelings of affection and concern for the unborn. The policies which flow from the liberal agenda are incompatible with, yet dependent upon, traditional social arrangements. The two undermine one another and suggest the ultimate unattainability of the larger vision from which they flow. The policy of equal opportunity, for example, encourages workers to move to locations where

available jobs match their talents - a policy which encourages a loosening of family and community bonds and obligations (as members, continually uprooted, are less pressured and less able to participate in extended family and local community problems). Such policies, in practice, tend to erode the loyalty and capacities for long-term and affectionate judgment which Hardin implicitly assumes are necessary for the good liberal citizen.

His commitment to full exploitation of our natural resources, too, is often at the expense of the predictable day-to-day shape of communities, and can contribute to dramatic reshaping and impoverishments of communities as its wealthier members leave to escape the damage which often accompanies such exploitation.

In the same way, policies which encourage widespread individual rights can erode the natural bonds of affection between parents and children, husbands and wives.

George Kateb suggests that liberalism seems to require a "continuous identity" to function, and yet it undermines the possibility of its attainment.[12]

Kateb argues that a continuous identity enables citizens to identify with the experiences of persons who have gone before them and who will follow them. Such continuous identification encourages those who live now to preserve and protect the way of life for future generations.

This identity is fostered by slow changes in the way of life, by a minimum of mobility and by strong kinship ties. The identity is solidified by beliefs in human uniqueness, beliefs which are nurtured by law and social policy.

This sense of uniqueness is being eroded by many liberal programs. Space exploration has established the seeming immensity of the universe, which weakens the uniqueness of people on earth. The vastness of modern warfare, the scale of human and material destruction, coupled with modern weapons in which the killers never see their victims, encourages a loss of identification with the experiences of others:

> as the reality of human beings as persons grows less visible - whether to the Pentagon bureaucrat or their agents - the sense of life as what human beings share weakens, and a-1 sorts of violence becomes more likely.[13]

Liberal programs which encourage government delivery of services unwittingly undermine longstanding identities and obligations of neighbors, families, and community organizations who previously assumed responsibility for the provision of basic needs.

So, too, the general expansion of experiences available to people through technological and psychological investigation has diminished, rather than enriched, our capacities for self and species - respect by emphasizing the <u>transitory</u> character of our social and self-identities and our experiences.

Many liberal programs assumed to <u>enhance</u> the quality of life diminish it in practice by disturbing the relatively unchanging features of social life and practices which make rich social relationships possible in the first instance. The success of the programs (such as abortion on demand) is dependent upon the existence of a strong sense of oneself as an individual member of a community who can make choices which will strengthen both; but the programs themselves promote social arrangements which make such identifications increasingly difficult to cultivate. There is

an implicit side to Hardin's liberalism which is unacknowledged in his defense of abortion on demand. This implicit side is typical of most family and population planners and feminists. When the underside is not made explicit, it encourages pro-abortionists to misunderstand, and criticize those who choose not to support liberalized abortion laws. Hardin is the most prominent example of this tendency, perhaps, but it exists for most pro-abortionists.

Perhaps one of the most valuable results of a re-engagement of liberals with anti-abortionists in the controversy would be acknowledgment of this aspect.

Finally, Hardin insists upon and claims that his position on abortion is an objective one which any neutral observer could accept. In actuality, however, Hardin has universalized his own way of life.

The celebration of affluence, of technological advance, of the small number but well-educated offspring, are certainly not prominent features of working class family life.

The social sciences, as I have already argued, are interpretive sciences. The social scientist has accepted some assumptions about human nature and rejected others, whether or not she makes this explicit. So, Hardin cannot claim that his are neutral observations. In his particular case, he could strengthen the <u>plausibility</u> of his claim by opposing them to others, and gauging whether or not his claims make more sense. Though this will not give a definitive interpretation (this cannot be a goal in the social sciences), it can guard against interpretations which have no rational basis whatsoever. And it can protect the interpreter from universalizing his or her own way of life and hence misinterpreting others.

2. Judith Jarvis Thompson

Judith Thompson, like Garrett Hardin, has tried to illuminate some of the less-discussed aspects of the pro-abortion position. And her work, like Hardin's, is particularly instructive for the way it suggests the poverty of the liberalism it explicitly celebrates. Consider, for example, her defense of the right to abortion.

Thompson argues that the right to life is not nearly so unproblematic as right-to-lifers would have us believe. More specifically, Thompson's argument is that "having a right to life does not guarantee having a right to be given the use of another's body - even if (the fetus) needs it for life itself."[14]

The right to life consists "not in the right not to be killed, but rather in the right not to be killed unjustly."[15] An unjust killing, presumably, is one in which the mother kills her fetus after having invited it to make use of her body, and the fetus, once conceived, does not threaten her physical or emotional health. Or, more simply, having the right to life, and being able to continue to live, are not the same things.

The right to life, says Thompson, is a natural right: it exists independently of whether or not it is actually granted by one human being to another. Whereas actually being given the means to sustain life is something which must be willingly extended to one person by another. It is this, and only this explicit contraction for the care and sustenance of another which is legally binding. If, for example, we make a contract with another person to keep that person alive, we must honor that contract unless extraordinary circumstances prevent us from

doing so. If we do not fulfill that contract, we have killed unjustly.

On this view, it is not a contradiction to say that while a fetus has a right to life, its mother does not necessarily have to provide it with what it needs to live. Unless she has assumed, implicitly or explicitly, "special responsibility" for fulfilling its right to life, she has no legal responsibility for keeping it alive. If she does abort the fetus, she has not killed unjustly and she has not violated its right to life.

According to Thompson, even if a mother has accepted responsibility explicitly for caring for her fetus, she is no longer legally obligated to carry it to term if this would require large sacrifices of her.

Thompson's main purpose in defending "rights" in this way is to separate from the concept any notion of "ought." For Thompson, "rights" is not a moral concept. Although some people do use the term in such a way that it follows from it that a right ought to be granted, Thompson considers this "an unfortunate loosening of what we would do better to keep a tight rein on."[16] She is challenging those who argue, for example, that since the fetus has a right to life, and since it must exist within the mother in order to live, the mother "ought" to let it do so.

Although Thompson agrees that there may be times when a person ought to do something, when "it would be callous, self-centered and indecent to refuse" (for example, to let another use my body for an hour when this brief use of it would save that person's life and not endanger my own), I would not be acting unjustly if I refused the request. I have not killed unjustly (even though I am the only one who can keep this person alive) unless I have agreed at some point that his

welfare is my burden. Outside of such a contract, this person can make no claim on me to grant his right to life.

But this conception of rights is problematic for several reasons. First of all, in our ordinary use of the concept "rights" we do not sever from it any notion of moral responsibility. When we say that someone has a right to something, we are also saying that unless there are overriding reasons, there is an obligation to provide for the exercise of that right. The contract for exercision is built into the concept itself. The obligation to honor the exercision of that right does not, in our ordinary use of that term, exist apart from the right (as Thompson would have it) so that first, there are rights, and then perhaps, some obligation to fulfill them.

The concept "rights" in our ordinary use of it, is formed from the moral point of view. There is a rich background of moral claims, duties, responsibilities, on which rights are built, upon which the concept depends. The moral point of view is built into the concept rights so that it is nonsensical to suggest that we have rights but no reason to expect them honored.

When Thompson severs the connection between rights and morality, she forces us to ask the point of rights in her scheme. She is using the concept in a way we ordinarily do not, and we should expect a justification for her preferred usage.

Second, even if we assume that the concept is not formed from the moral point of view, Thompson's account is still problematic. For she assumes that it will be relatively easy to decide who has assumed "special responsibility" for their fulfillment and who has not. But in the examples

Thompson uses of where there is a question of legal responsibility (when, for example, a mother who originally wanted her child aborts it when she is eight months pregnant) Thompson implies that we must "fall back" on our traditional moral standards of what appropriate behavior should be. Thompson makes implicit use of a connection between morality and rights which she explicitly denies.

Consider, for example, her argument that in some instances it would be "morally indecent," though not a violation of its rights, for a pregnant woman to abort her fetus. Thompson argues that it would be morally indecent for a pregnant woman to abort her seven month old fetus to enjoy more fully a Caribbean cruise, or for a rape victim to abort her thirty-eight week old fetus.[17]

Similarly, she argues that it would be morally indecent if I refused to save your life when all I had to do to save you would be to walk ten yards to you and touch your head. We expect that I would make such a minimal effort for such a maximum benefit, but neither you nor the victim has a <u>right</u> to expect a minimum of decency from me.

But in these examples, Thompson is trading in on ideas and beliefs most of us share about the way our way of life should be. These ideas and beliefs are moral in the sense that they are important features of our prized way of life and without them our way of life would be something less - coarser, less decent.

Often these moral requirements change in response to other changes in the way of life; some of them seem never to change; some of them never become part of the legal system. They are, instead, woven into the fabric of our society through custom, convention, tradition. Living by these

is an important feature of the way of life - even though they are not always part of the legal system.

Thompson argues that everyday civilities we accord one another continue to exist alongside our more formal rights. We can understand her use of "morally indecent" in this way. She can make no connection, though, between these "moral indecencies" and the proper exercise of rights. Thompson embraces a legalistic, individualistic, conception of rights which is at odds with the social practice of rights.

Consider, for example, Hegel's criticisms of the utilitarian model of rights Thompson adopts. In civil society, Hegel claims, men relate to one another as individuals and as individual bearers of rights. Each individual seeks his or her own fulfillment, though this requires working with others.

But Hegel cautioned against sole identification with civil society. Without some identification beyond civil society, individuals can be expected to lose their sense of self-respect and respect for others, and become a "heap" or "rabble."

Civil society is kept in balance only by its members identifying with others at different levels - both in the family (where members share love and commitments based on feeling) and through the state.

A society based on utilitarian principles alone could not survive. Modern societies like our own where utilitarian principles are encouraged and expressed in many of our institutions and practices carry on by "coasting" on traditional allegiances to them and the way of life they symbolize; and by creating visions which transcend the mere consideration of utility which are its supposed official guide.[18]

Thompson's expression of an individualist conception of rights depends implicitly on the woman's (in the case of abortion) understanding and use of traditional, extra-legal, moral practices. Thompson assumes, for example, that the absolute right of the mother to destroy her fetus is accompanied by a sense of decency which will discourage the wanton destruction of early life.

But the structures for developing this sense of decency, I shall argue more fully below, are undermined, weakened, by the individualist, truncated policies Thompson celebrates. She condones a way of life in which, for example, the father of an unborn child has no right to decide whether or not it shall live; yet she is confident that, should the unborn child need its father for a blood transfusion, he would gladly oblige.

Her explicit celebration of individual rights, often at the expense of traditional family life, assumes implicitly the durable, loving bonds of traditional family life. Her legalism is dependent upon moral custom even as it jeopardizes it.

Strict attention to one level, that of individual rights, moreover, keeps the analysis of social life at a very abstract level. This can encourage a misunderstanding of the effects of individual rights in more concrete social practices.

I have mentioned already the ways in which the right to elective abortion has become for many the obligation to abort. This change has also occurred with the right to die and the right to amniocentesis.

Amniocentesis, for example, is promoted as that test which enables families to produce only the healthiest of children, a particular

benefit to those parents who already have a Down's Syndrome child. In this procedure, fluid is taken from the amniotic sac to test for genetic abnormalities.

Its acceptance by parents implies an acceptance of new, liberal standards of health, standards which exclude those infants with handicaps of most sorts.

The very existence of amniocentesis, of the state's willingness (indeed, eagerness) to subsidize it, and the state's responsibility (in most instances) for subsidizing the care of Down's Syndrome children, contribute to pressuring parents into considering the right to amniocentesis as the obligation to undergo it.

I know from personal experience the pressures medical authorities can and do put on the parents of a Down's Symdrome child not to chance the birth of another one. This pressure, in turn, can contribute to changes in the shape of the family relationship.

Paul Ramsey suggests, for example, that the bond of trust between parents and child is weakened by the very decision to undergo amniocentesis. For the parents must contemplate seriously the destruction of their offspring before the test is even administered. The mere consideration weakens the parental identity as protectors of their offspring.[19]

The parent-child bond of trust is also jeopardized if there are siblings involved. If the parents are undergoing amniocentesis because an existing child has a genetic defect, this child might well think that her parents would have preferred, had they had the opportunity, to abort her. The bond of trust might be eroded as well when the child born after a negative amniocentesis test is informed of the test when she is older.

Ramsey argues that the parent-child bond of unquestioned affection and trust, which sustains the relationship throughout a lifetime, is diminished in its quality and content by the very decision to undergo amniocentesis. In his interviews with parents in the process of undergoing the procedure, Ramsey found that most distanced themselves from the nascent child prior to a notification of the results, and none would even consider the possibility of a false diagnosis of Down's Syndrome (and therefore the abortion of a normal infant).

Analagous observations have been made about the decision to abort. The very consideration of the destruction of the nascent life weakens the bond between parent and child (and may well weaken the relationship between parents and other children). In Magda Dene's observations in a New York abortion clinic, for example, many women six to seven months pregnant, were claiming that they had never felt fetal movement, even though most women feel the fetus quite strongly by the fifth month of pregnancy. The disassociation from the fetus was so great, or the need to disassociate was so essential to the consideration of abortion, that many women acted, literally, as if there were no life there.[20]

This distancing and weakening of mother-child, parent-child bond affects the way medical authorities treat the live births which often result from late abortions. In the absence of any indication that the child is wanted by its parents, many doctors and nurses present at the live births do not feel compelled to try to save the infants' lives. As one nurse said to me, "I know the mother doesn't want it, so I take my time getting it to the intensive care nursery."

The situation at the other end of the spectrum - that of the

terminally ill - is similar. The existence of life-support equipment, the right to allow patients to die, changing standards which prize the painless death, the enormous cost of maintaining life-support equipment and the burden of the cost being a state responsibility in most cases, contribute to a deterioration of family bonds.

The medical authorities must be consulted; the cost to the survivors must be kept in mind; the family must weigh the emotional and monetary cost of keeping a member alive against the amount of suffering a member is undergoing and against the wishes of the patient.

In all instances, that of amniocentesis, abortion, and elaborate life-support systems, the existence of new technology and the pressure to use it (encouraged by liberal standards of health) can contribute to a weakening of family bonds when they can withstand it least.

The existence of outside medical authorities to whom the family must appeal, the pressure to view the right to the use of the new technology as an <u>obligation</u> to make use of it, diminishes the privacy of the family unit, the confidence of its members to meet the needs of its sick or disabled members, and the natural trust and affection that the members' welfare will always be a foremost consideration.

The sense of and capacity for responsibility diminishes not only with the availability of and pressure to make use of new technology, but also in conjunction with the results of other aspects of liberal ideology. It is difficult to care for one's elderly parents, for example, when doing so would mean moving to an area where employment opportunities would diminish one's income and perhaps the possibility of providing adequate care.

When discussions of individual rights remain at an abstract level they miss the changes which often occur in everyday situations which deform that right, often changing it to an obligation and diminishing the social bonds of those participating in that right.

The abstract quality of Thompson's work is dependent, too, on her assumption that this abstract level of analysis ensures that her arguments are neutral. In fact, she, like Hardin, universalizes her own beliefs.

The casualness of her treatment of the person who would refuse to do the bare minimum to save another's life would certainly horrify most of those outside the university circles of speculation, as would giving priority to individual rights over family stability threaten many working class and traditional people. Thompson's strict individualism, while popular, is not neutral, but a reflection of her own assumptions and beliefs about "the good society."

3. Conclusion

The explicitness of Garrett Hardin and Judith Jarvis Thompson's remarks have helped to illuminate the weaknesses and dilemmas of the pro-abortionists' position. They show how this position is dependent, in part, upon a set of practices and beliefs which are part of the working class ideal, which are incompatible with the more individualist aspects of liberalism.

This ultimate incompatibility is a key reason for the participants in the abortion controversy to compromise. Pro-abortionists could, on reflection, see the inner rationality of at least some aspects of anti-abortionism.

First, there is their refusal to draw a line establishing the particular point of fetal development at which the fetus becomes a person. This is implicit in most pro-abortion arguments. Even Planned Parenthood, perhaps the most prominent group to support abortion on demand and to deny the early personhood of the fetus, celebrated its personhood only a decade or so ago. In its 1964 brochure, the organization asks: "Is (contraception) abortion? Definitely not. An abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun."[21]

And second, pro-abortionists could, on reflection, understand how traditional family life has features which are important to the promotion of morally developed and responsible citizens. The pro-abortionists would not have to grant total rationality to the traditional way of life, but grant that it has some legitimacy and rationality to it.

These critiques of Thompson and Hardin (and in the larger sense, pro-abortionism) could cultivate some ground for the anti-abortionists to compromise. Perhaps though, they could not see completely the legitimacy of a way of life which promotes broad individual rights, they could see sufficient rationale to tolerate it.

In my final chapter, I shall explore the possibilities for compromise.

NOTES

[1]Garrett Hardin, "Parenthood: Right or Privilege?" Science (July, 1970), p. 5.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Hardin, The Limits of Altruism (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1976), p. 116.

[4]Hardin, "The Case for Legalized Abortion" in Stalking The Wild Taboo (Los Altos: Kaufman, 1973).

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 26.

[7]Hardin, "Abortion or Compulsory Pregnancy?" Journal of Marriage and the Family (May, 1968), p. 272.

[8]Hardin, Limits.

[9]Hardin, Limits.

[10]Alan Carlson, "Families, Sex and the Liberal Agenda" in The Human Life Review (Winter, 1976), pp. 64-73.

[11]Ibid.

[12]George Kateb, "The Next Stage of Nihilism," Social Research (Autumn, 1976), pp. 271-300.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion" in The Rights and Wrongs of Abortion, ed. Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon.

[15]Thompson, "Right and Deaths" in Cohen et al., op. cit.

[16]Ibid., p. 16.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Charles Taylor, Hegel.

[19]Paul Ramsey, "Abortion: A Review Article," reprinted in Three On Abortion (Child and Family, 1978).

[20]Magda Denes, In Necessity and Sorrow (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[21]International Planned Parenthood Pamphlet, 1963.

C H A P T E R V

THE DIMENSIONS OF A COMPROMISE

1. An Abstract Case For Compromise

In a policy which promotes competing ways of life there are bound to be conflicts, such as that over abortion, which are not amenable to simple negotiation. Yet, these conflicts often evoke such intense feelings and beliefs that all parties agree that a state policy is needed to control the conflict. The ability of the state to respond is shaped, in part, by the ability of all parties to see, upon reflection, some rationality to the opponent's way of life.

This rationality may not be immediately evident. It is possible, for example, for one party to find it difficult to see a plausible defense of a competing way of life because the ideas and beliefs of its participants have been widely misinterpreted. Or perhaps, the ideas and beliefs which support a particular position have not been sufficiently publicly articulated. An essential preliminary to the settlement of such a conflict may be the public expression of the less articulated position to ensure it as much coherence and rationality as inspires it.

In such a conflict, there may be arguments and considerations on both sides which are not resolvable, and it may well be that neither side can understand the other side perfectly. But, if there is some mutual respect for the beliefs of all parties, and a shared belief that there is a possibility of deep social disaffection resulting from the

conflict which outweighs the necessity of perfect compromise, the state is in a position to encourage a compromise.

The compromise may not speak to the highest ideals of the society. Its justification lies, instead, in the fact that all parties agree that no set of beliefs, or way of life, is without some justification, and that support is owed those public policies intended to maintain at least the minimum of integrity necessary to preserve all ways of life. The potential political compromise is morally justified even though it probably will not be cause for moral celebration.

2. The Specific Instance of Abortion

What, specifically, are the possibilities for compromise on abortion policies in the United States? There are, to be sure, intense feelings and beliefs about the issues by all participants. And there is agreement on the need for a state policy to control contraceptive practice and abortion.

The dimensions of a compromise for which the state could expect widespread support are set by two conditions. The first is the willingness and ability of the participants to try to understand why their opponents see abortion as vitally affecting their way of life, and why the way of life is so precious that abortion policy must be shaped to protect it. The second factor is the current role of the state in many aspects of family life.

As I have argued, the major participants in the abortion controversy seem to have very little understanding of and respect for the positions of their opponents. Pro-abortionists have misunderstood the

role of the family in the working class way of life and have failed to see working class anti-abortionism as, in part, a defense of that life. They have not understood how their anti-abortionism is a rational response to protect their sense of self.

The popularization of the pro-abortionist position that all or most anti-abortionists are power-obsessed, women-hating, religious fanatics has only increased the hostility and alienation of anti-abortionists and diminished the grounds for compromise.

And the anti-abortionists, on the defensive but without acknowledged grounds for compromise, have not sympathetically reviewed the beliefs of pro-abortionists about the need to make abortion available.

The most promising approach to promoting a sympathetic dialogue between the two parties is to delineate and insist upon, publicly, the inner rationality of the less articulated (anti-abortionist) position, and to call attention to aspects of the working class way of life which many pro-abortionists implicitly embrace.

As I have argued, there are several good reasons for expecting that a public articulation of the inner rationality of the anti-abortionist position would encourage sympathy for it. And there are good reasons for supposing that feminists and planners would, on reflection, admit that many of their beliefs about abortion, family life and liberalism would be destructive of the liberal ideal if not supported in practice by beliefs central to traditional ways of life. Ideally, feminists and planners would come to understand how, in their arguments for abortion, they have illicitly universalized their own ways of life and have badly misinterpreted important aspects of the anti-abortion movement as a consequence.

So, in addition to widespread agreement that a state policy on contraception and abortion is essential, and some possible grounds for promoting compromise, we need to ask if participants are willing and able to respect each other's positions enough to grant them the minimal amount of legitimacy which would be essential to a compromise, and then to ask if the state could fashion a compromise which would accord each some legitimacy while addressing its own needs.

The possibility for compromise requires some speculation, most importantly because the anti-abortionist position is so narrowly defined and insufficiently articulated. But the speculation can be controlled by exploring the way a reasonably similar society, like France, has handled the compromise, and by setting out the existing evidence for supposing that a compromise is not out of the question.

To begin, the fact that several prominent American pro-abortionists have changed their positions bodes well for a compromise. And the fact that their sympathies were broadened by more attention to the issues of fetal personhood and the legitimate state limits on personal rights, encourages my suspicions that these two concerns will provide the dimensions of a compromise.

It is more difficult to gauge the willingness of anti-abortionists to embrace a compromise which would give ascendant rights to the mother over her unborn child and over her spouse. The gross misinterpretation of the anti-abortionist position by pro-abortionists and the media has encouraged a hostility toward compromise by at least some anti-abortionists. But some prominent spokespeople are arguing that a political compromise is probably the most promising route toward ending the wanton,

if not all, destruction of unborn human life.

Joseph Sobran, one of the most prominent non-Catholic anti-abortionists, argues that given the obstacles which the anti-abortionists face, their most promising political move is toward establishing the principle that abortion is wrong and hope that in time this will "dispose men's minds toward the acceptance of abortion in the long run." Sobran believes that laws can educate the citizenry, and that the public, legal acknowledgment of the personhood of the fetus, at some future point in time, might discourage, at least, the use of abortion as a contraceptive of first resort.

And Paul Ramsey, a scholar from Princeton who has written extensively on abortion, is arguing that even amidst deep hostility toward anti-abortionists, there are some grounds for compromise. Ramsey is pressing for laws, in the spirit of Roe v. Wade, which would charge doctors with equal care of potentially viable fetuses whether or not they are the products of induced abortions. More specifically, Ramsey is arguing that the states mandate the use of prostaglandins in induced abortions, as they tend to produce more live infants than in the saline induced abortions most commonly performed now. Ramsey suggests that even though the Supreme Court is interested only in the health of the mother, its 1973 decisions leave some leeway for state laws aimed at protecting the older aborted fetuses. This would be in keeping, moreover, with the position of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists which has always maintained that the primary purpose of abortions is not to kill the fetus.[2]

The willingness of both Sobran and Ramsey to consider seriously

compromises at odds with their personal convictions suggests that many other anti-abortionists might be able to support a state-sponsored compromise. My experiences with working class women suggest that they would be willing to support a compromise which is geared toward the protection of the unborn and the traditional family.

Although the specifics of a compromise which could command broad support would be dependent upon reactions about which we can only hazard a guess, the French abortion laws might serve as a model for our own compromise.

3. The French Abortion Compromise

The French abortion laws are designed to "respect life, assist women in physical danger, provide every woman with optimum conditions for keeping her child, and allow individuals and doctors freedom of conscience."[3]

> The law guarantees the respect of every human being from the beginning of life. There shall be no infringement of this principle except in case of necessity and according to the conditions defined by present law.[4]

The emphasis on respect for life "from the beginning" sets the moral tone of French abortion legislation. All parties to the abortion controversy in France agree that the unborn fetus is a human being from the moment of conception, and that the decision to abort is a moral decision.

The laws are designed to allow only those women to abort for whom carrying the pregnancy to term would be an "unbearable distress." Though in the last analysis, the choice for abortion is the pregnant woman's, she must follow a set of procedures designed to make abortion

the least attractive option.

She must, first of all, approach a physician, who must:

1. Inform her of the medical risks she runs for herself and for her future pregnancies.

2. Deliver to the woman a dossier containing:

a. A list of the rights, assistance, and advantages guaranteed by the Family Law to mothers, unmarried or not, and to their children, as well as the possibilities offered by the adoption of a baby to be born.

b. A list of organizations which can give her additional counseling.

The woman must then consult an "information, consultation, or family counseling service, or center for family planning or education, a social service or other approved organization which is to issue her an attestation of the consultation."[5]

This consultation includes a private interview in the course of which aid and advice appropriate to the situation of the woman concerned is provided for her, in addition to the necessary resources for resolving the social problems faced. Wherever possible, couples are encouraged to participate in the decision to be made.

3. If the woman, following these consultations, renews her request for an abortion, the physician requests a written confirmation no sooner than one week after the woman's first request.

4. Finally, if the woman is an unmarried minor, the consent of one of the persons exercising parental authority, or the legal guardian, is required.

The abortion must be performed by the tenth week of pregnancy. There is some hostility in France toward this compromise. There are those, for example, who oppose the public funding of the abortions. Others think the restrictions are too strict, while some argue that they are too liberal. Most agree that the laws have had the intended effect of restricting abortions.

A compromise based on the French model would be likely to meet more resistance in the United States.

First of all, abortion is a lucrative business here. The French effectively prevented this by restricting the performance of abortions to public and private hospitals. But, if Bernard Nathanson's accounts of the greed he encountered by most of those involved in abortion clinics is any evidence, we can expect strong opposition to such a compromise by pharmaceutical companies and the owners and operators of abortion clinics.

Second, the Supreme Court's decision that the early fetus is not a person with rights makes the acceptance of a proposal featuring the respect for the early fetus, more difficult to cultivate than it was in France. Although all parties to the American controversy act implicitly as if the fetus is a person worthy of respect, most feminists and liberals will not embrace this publicly.

There are, as I have argued, reasons for maintaining that liberals and feminists could and should agree to support laws which stress the moral impact of the decision to abort.

The willingness and ability of all participants to compromise could be enhanced by a re-opening of dialogue between the parties with a concentration on the issues of fetal personhood and the family. It is

essential that the anti-abortion position be presented as part of a particular way of life, and not, restrictively, as a set of religious beliefs.

4. The Role of the State

The final important factor in a compromise is, of course, the state itself, and the fact that it is already well-insinuated in American family life. Our welfare state assist mothers without other means of support, pays for some abortions, and shapes family policy in general.

Many anti-abortionists have argued that the state's interference in family life weakens it, and that this is particularly true of current abortion policy. A key goal for anti-abortionists is a withdrawal of the state from its overwhelming influence in family life.

Allan Carlson, writing in support of this view, charges that recent efforts by the state, in a variety of contexts, to strengthen the family have had the opposite effect. Lewis Coser's study on Stalin's attempts to strengthen the family, for example, concluded that his very interference in family affairs undermined parental authority. And recent research on the effects of Sweden's marriage-loan act, intended to encourage earlier marriage and more children per family, actually produced families with fewer children than in those families not helped by the state.

> And while defensive explanation abound, the fact remains that the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare experiments with income-maintenance programs have seen divorce, separation, and desertion figures significantly higher than among control families receiving no benefits. The disconcerting reality appears to be that state social intervention on behalf of families actually weakens or destroys families.[5]

But even if the anti-abortionists were able to make their case against state intervention per se, it might still be the case that, at this point, the state could not withdraw from all its functions in family life without causing serious dislocations anti-abortionists would not, on reflection, support.

For many anti-abortionists who call for a diminished state presence in family life miss the extent to which some families are dependent upon it for those resources traditional families are able to provide for themselves. Many women cannot rely on faithful and dependable spouses and extended families to help them rear their children.

Many pregnant teenagers have neither the traditional moral parental support to guide them in their sexual experiences nor the parental support to help them carry their pregnancies to term. In many ways, the way of life which anti-abortionists celebrate is in eclipse; and should the state relinquish its support of many who look to it for assistance, there would be no other institution (most particularly, the traditional family) to assist most of them.

Unless most anti-abortionists were willing to concede that the state is already well insinuated in the family life and that its abrupt withdrawal could hurt our weakest citizens, it is unlikely that a compromise could be fashioned which would receive broad support. But it is quite conceivable that anti-abortionists would be able and willing to support measures which, while recognizing the immediate need of state assistance to families and communities which are relatively stable and intact, and at reviewing public policies in light of their consequences for traditional family life.

It might be argued, for example, that proposed public housing projects which disrupt community and neighborhood life, or employment policies which require workers to accept positions involving frequent, distant moves, be criticized, revised, perhaps shelved, in light of their effect on strong family life.

The state's ability to fashion a compromise is shaped in part by its commitment to assist families, by its liberal notion of what constitutes a family, and by the fact that these have encouraged ways of family life which could not exist now without state support. The most promising compromise, in my view, would be one which recognized the legitimacy of traditional (e.g., working class) families and which gave their continued existence some priority, while not immediately abandoning its commitment to support a wide spectrum of groupings identifying themselves as families.

There are good reasons for believing that a compromise modelled after the French compromise and with acknowledgment of the legitimacy of traditional family life, could, in time, win broad support.

Feminists and planners would have to reason to support it because it would acknowledge the personhood of the fetus while also recognizing that the final decision to abort must be the pregnant woman's. And the compromise would insist that since the right to decide belongs equally to all women, no woman would be denied the right to abort because she could not afford this procedure. The state would have to provide public funding for women who cannot otherwise afford to abort.

The compromise is one which working class people should be able to tolerate, if not celebrate, because it is based on the importance of

respect for the unborn and for traditional family life. It is structured to eliminate, as much as possible, frivolous abortions, and to encourage women (with substantial support from public and private agencies when needed) to carry their pregnancies to term. Finally, the provisions require that unmarried minors seek the consent and, presumably, moral guidance of their families.

The compromise would, of course, require the funding of medicaid abortions. But the rationale for providing the funding would be that this was a choice of last resort and a serious moral choice, thus, ideally accentuating the importance of the unborn child. This is in contrast to current claims by feminists that the state must fund abortions merely because it cannot discriminate against the poor.

Ideally, the compromise would restrict the use of abortion as a contraceptive of first resort; and would promote laws charging physicians with equal care of fetuses born alive, whether or not they were the products of induced abortions.

Obviously, a compromise which discourages abortion requires that provisions be made for those women, unsupported by others, who choose to carry their pregnancies to term.

There are many private agencies which are able to provide these services, and we can expect them to be given increased support from the private sector should such a compromise be accepted. But, at least for the immediate future, we would have to expect the continuance of government assistance, like AFDC, for those women with no other means of supporting their children.

5. Conclusions

In my dissertation, I have argued that there are good reasons for most participants in the abortion controversy to try to compromise; and that there is sufficient raw material for a morally informed political compromise.

I have argued that the most formidable obstacle to a settlement has been a misreading of the intentions and a strength of their opponents by the pro-abortionists.

Most feminists and planners have assumed that the anti-abortion movement is comprised for the most part, of a small but powerful group of men who feel threatened by the freedom of abortion-on-demand gives women.

Most recent research suggests, instead, that the movement is comprised of men and women from many religions and backgrounds. But, most importantly, in terms of effect, the anti-abortion movement is supported by most working class people.

I have tried to illuminate how abortion-on-demand threatens the ideal of working class family life, and the self-understanding of working class people in their most important relationships - family relationships. Even though not all, or even perhaps most, working class people are faithful to the ideal, it is widely embraced and used as a standard to assess conduct.

The ideal cherishes family stability, and the importance of long-term, unconditional commitments, to friends, community and family members.

The feminists and planners, who are the most vocal of the pro-abortionists, base their support on the need for individual freedom and

rights, which threaten the working class ideal by undermining parental authority, and the ability to respect all life whatever its stage of development.

But most feminists and planners, I have argued, assume implicitly, the need for social practices such as those which encourage durable family and community life, which their explicit policies help to undermine.

Most pro-abortionists also recognize the impossibility of drawing a line at any point during its growth when the fetus changes from a non-person to a person.

The implicit side of the pro-abortionist argument has not been illuminated because of their withdrawal from public debate following the 1973 Supreme Court decisions. The features, though, provide the raw material for compromise with the anti-abortionists.

The French abortion laws could serve as a model for our compromise. They are based, foremost, on respect for unborn life, and secondly, though importantly, on the mother's right not to carry a distressful pregnancy to term.

I have argued that we can expect some obstacles to acceptance of a compromise. Some feminists, for example, celebrate a way of life so opposed to the nuclear and extended family norms and to male/female relationships in general, that we might expect opposition to any attempts to restrain the absolute right of women to abort, and to strengthen the traditional family.

In addition, we can expect opposition from private abortion clinics and the pharmaceutical companies who have an enormous stake in the

practice of abortion.

Finally, the liberal agenda for the family would have to be reviewed in light of the abortion compromise to illuminate its implicit side.

But, there are good reasons for arguing that participants have an obligation at least to reopen public debate on liberal abortion laws.

The acknowledged weaknesses of the Supreme Court decisions on abortion (acknowledged even by some pro-abortionists); the increasing momentum of the Right-to-Life movement; and the fact that an entire way of life is being threatened by the liberal laws, are good reasons for claiming that both the pro- and anti-abortionists have a moral obligation to try to work out a compromise. The fact that there are grounds for such a compromise, increases the obligation.

And, as I have argued, since the state is already very implicated in family life, even though its presence may well contribute toward its weakening, a compromise will probably maintain a state presence in the family, if not increase it in some instances.

Without state assistance, efforts to limit abortions are likely to jeopardize most those already living on the fringes of society.

We can insist, though, that public policies be made with the effect on family life in mind, and that, if policies do not improve that quality of family life, at least they do not impair it.

The compromise I have suggested is not ideal; but we can expect, ideally, from the compromise, a generalized respect for the unborn which would encourage couples to contracept responsibly; that doctors treat all fetuses with equal respect and care; and that citizens and policymakers

be willing to formulate public policies which encourage durable family and civic relationships.

Finally, I have tried to suggest that there are reasons why some may not want to compromise, at least not in the immediate future. The most striking aspect of my research has been the tremendous hostility of pro- and anti-abortionists toward one another. This has led more than a few of them to suggest the impossibility of compromise. I could speculate that a compromise, if it were to come about, would be years in the making.

The misinterpretations have been so gross and the range of debate so narrow, that the dialogue itself will have to be reshaped before the opponents can begin to have a measure of respect for one another. But there are some reasons for expecting that this might occur. Most important among them is the fact that both prominent anti- and pro-abortionists have suggested compromise as the morally expedient path.

The possibilities for compromise could be widened if the debate were renewed and, particularly, if working class anti-abortionism were expressed as part of a larger set of beliefs about the importance of traditional family relationships.

The immediate possibilities for compromise are quite grim. But since there are grounds for a compromise, means for promoting it, and the possible outcome of a more cohesive policy, there are good reasons for insisting that a compromise be attempted.

NOTES

[1]Joseph Sobran, "Six Years After," Human Life Review (Winter, 1979).

[2]Paul Ramsey, "Can the 1973 Abortion Decisions Be Justly Hedged?" Human Life Review (Summer, 1978).

[3]Valery Giscard d'Estaing, as quoted in Harold O. J. Brown, "Abortion on Demand in France," The Human Life Review (Winter, 1976).

[4]Ibid., p. 66.

[5]Allan Carlson, "Families, Sex and the Liberal Agenda" in The Human Review (Summer, 1978), p. 47. Italics in text.

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